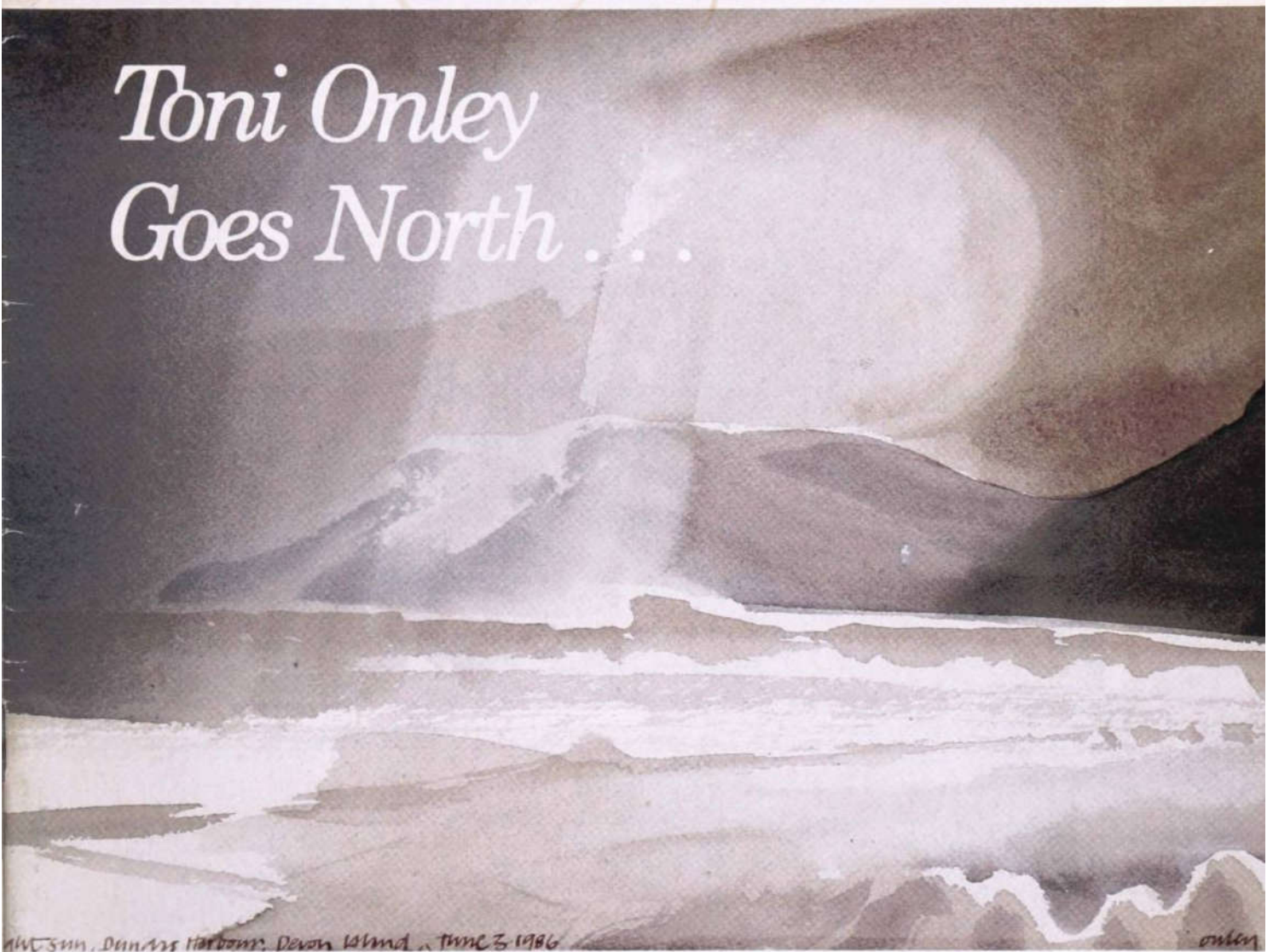


The Beaver

April/May, 1987/\$3.50

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

*Toni Onley
Goes North . . .*

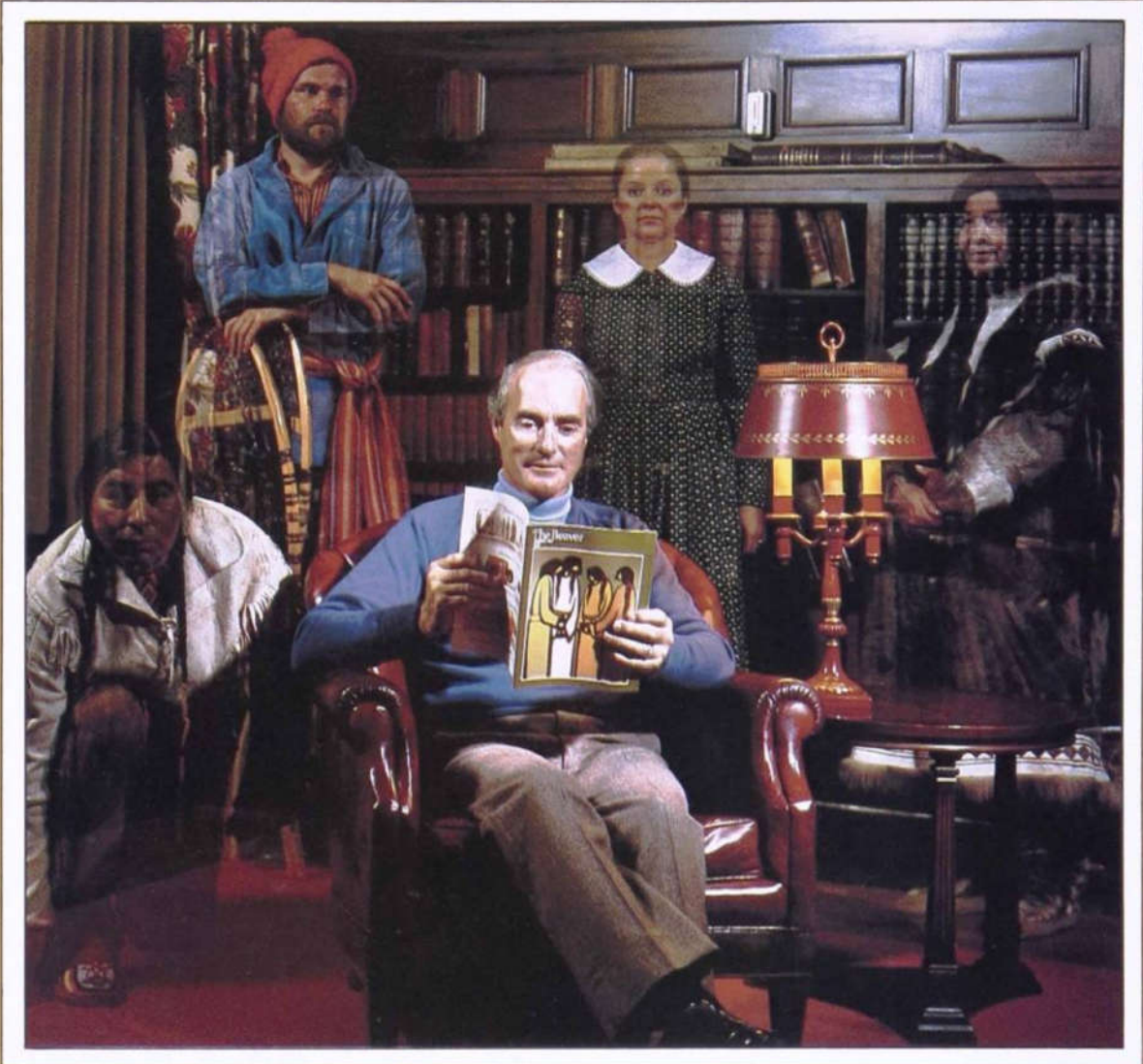


Art: Sun, Dan, Mr. Harbison, Devon Island, June 3, 1986

onley



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WILSON MacDONALD

A Shakespeare For Canada

By Cheryl MacDonald

“**T**wo kinds of people in this world are egotists — fools and geniuses. I am a genius.” So Canadian poet Wilson MacDonald told a magazine reporter in 1958. MacDonald was 77 at the time, and his poetry had been published since before the turn of the century. Despite a prodigious output, including eleven volumes of poetry, MacDonald’s position in the Canadian literary world was equivocal. On the one hand, he was hailed as a genius by fans who formed a Wilson MacDonald Poetry Society in 1953, and admired by many famous persons. “The great experience of my trip to Canada,” was how Albert Einstein described his meeting with the poet. Northrop Frye told an interviewer, “If I were compiling an anthology of Canadian verse, I would certainly include Wilson MacDonald’s superb poem, *Exit*.”

Yet numerous critics characterized his work as banal, “homely verse” with “no distinction of phrase.” Even friends and admirers found his unrelenting self-confidence difficult to swallow. One admirer told Lorne Pierce, MacDonald’s publisher, “I love Wilson MacDonald from a distance . . . but I would kill the son of a gun if I were as closely associated with him as you are.” For MacDonald, of course, there was no question of accepting the critics’ views. “I believe that I am a genius. My poetry will live as long as Shakespeare, Keats or Shelley.”

The self-styled genius was born in Cheapside, Ontario, a hamlet near Lake Erie, on 5 May 1880. Christened Wilson Pugsley MacDonald, he was the son of Anna Maria Pugsley and Alexander MacDonald. Wilson’s father and maternal grandfather were both Baptist preachers; his father’s dramatic reading of the Psalms was so well liked that people travelled from miles around to hear him. Unfortunately, the elder MacDonald’s orthodoxy was not as acceptable as his oratorical skills. His conviction that “hell is only remorse” forced him out of preaching and back into tailoring.

Aside from this controversy, young Wilson’s early childhood was happy. His mother, an accomplished musician, passed along her gift for music, while his father encouraged his love of poetry and nature. “Music and poetry were the two great passions of my father and mother. My mother sang and played for me and my father read poetry to me whenever they wished to give me a special treat,” he once remarked. “A walk in a wood with my father meant more to me than a ticket to the circus, for he told me wonderful tales during those walks which made all woodlands forever a garden of romance.”

Unfortunately, Wilson’s idyllic childhood ended with his mother’s death. When his father remarried, the boy was unable to get along with his stepmother and went to live with relatives. Eventually, his uncle, John

Pugsley, was given custody. Unlike Wilson's father, however, his Uncle John had no love for poetry or music and would not allow such topics to be discussed. Furthermore, although Wilson did well in school, his uncle was anxious for him to earn a living. Denied access to an inheritance from his mother, Wilson reluctantly went to work. "My immediate objective was then to be fired. In this I was a success; in my first year I lost six jobs." Reluctantly, his uncle released the inheritance and Wilson went to Hamilton's McMaster University. According to one tradition, as he left his uncle's house for the last time, Wilson shouted, "Poetry, poetry, poetry!"

Wilson spent two years at McMaster. By this time, he had grown into a slim, neatly dressed young man with dark skin and piercing dark eyes. He was not particularly handsome, but his face was sensitive and expressive. Possibly his most attractive feature was his voice, which enabled him to recite poetry with drama and flair. Wilson was already writing poetry, and, in 1899 in Toronto his first poem was published in *The Globe*. Around the same time, another was published in a Boston newspaper.

Eventually, the young poet realized his literary endeavours could not bring him enough money to support himself. He went to the United States, where he found work as a freelance advertising copywriter. Although he deplored such commercial work, he was highly successful at it, making as much as \$150 for a morning's work (he later inflated the figure to \$800). After seven years, however, he turned his back on advertising. "I was compelled to give it up, or have my genius destroyed. Even then, it took five years of hard writing to wean me from the commercial influence."

Those five years were spent writing continually, often in cheap rooms in Toronto. Frequently, Wilson came close to starvation. On one occasion, he lent all his remaining cash to an itinerant preacher, who absconded with it to Mexico. Fortunately, he found \$100 stuffed into a seldom-worn shoe. "I went to the nearest restaurant and ordered a big meal, but I was still so hungry I ordered it all over again."

Eventually, it seemed his hard work and suffering was about to pay off. In 1918, his first volume of poetry, *Song of the Prairie Land*, was published. MacDonald continued to submit poetry to various magazines and newspapers, and in 1921 he published a small book of religious verse, *The Miracle Songs of Jesus*. By 1923, he and his publisher, Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press, felt there was sufficient interest in his work to warrant a tour of Western Canada. The tour started in North Bay on 1 October and continued through various prairie towns and on to Vancouver. A pamphlet and promotional letters were distributed in advance, and almost immediately trouble began to

brew. The pamphlet, which had been at least partly written by MacDonald, sang so highly of the poet's work that people were sceptical. Ernest P. Fewster, president of a Vancouver poetic society, told Lorne Pierce in a letter that he was "flabbergasted" at the incredible praise. And Arthur Phelps, who promoted MacDonald's Winnipeg appearance, confessed he stopped distributing the pamphlets when he realized how much harm they were doing. MacDonald was not



Easily to the old

Opens the hard ground:

But when youth grows cold,

And red lips have no sound,

Bitterly does the earth

Open to receive

And bitterly do the grasses

In the churchyard grieve.

Cold clay knows how to hold

An aged hand;

But how to comfort youth

It does not understand.

Even the gravel rasps

In a dumb way

When youth comes homing

Before its day.

— From *Exit*

By Wilson MacDonald.



Public Archives of Canada / PA-147999

The poet in 1935.

so well-known as he liked to think, and people who had never heard of him were suspicious of the extravagant comments about his work.

But the real problem, Phelps said, was MacDonald's ego. Convinced of his genius, he was disappointed at his reception in Winnipeg, although Phelps reported it was a good one. Furthermore, Phelps said, people were intrigued by the poet — only his ego kept getting in the way. For instance, Phelps said MacDonald spent too much time on "Song of the Undertow", claiming it surpassed English poet John Masefield's "Dauber". Phelps thought "Song of the Undertow" was "mostly unilluminated doggerel" and suggested as much to MacDonald. Wilson "intimated that I knew neither life nor literature, and yet I think we parted friends — I am still intrigued by him . . . Sometimes another self peers from behind his super-sensitive and inflamed ego. And that self is captivating."

Here was the problem that would influence people's opinions of Wilson MacDonald for decades. He had talent: his poetry was published and admired by many. Lorne Pierce, champion of Bliss Carman and Marjorie Pickthall, said MacDonald "is truly a great poet, one of our greatest." Nor were his talents limited to poetry. He illustrated several of his manuscripts with exquisite drawings, hand-writing many of his poems in elegant script. He wrote music and plays, too, and his poetry

readings were dramatic and intriguing. He did magic tricks with such consummate skill that professional magicians called on him. And he was a superb athlete, swimming, playing tennis, hockey, soccer, and, on one occasion, equalling the record for the 100-yard dash. But always MacDonald's complete lack of humility, his total belief in his genius, intruded. "Everything I have done has been extraordinary, although even the best things have not been as good as my poetry."

Many were willing to accept MacDonald's claim, impressed, perhaps, by his unshakeable belief in himself, or seduced by his dramatic poetry readings. With the oratorical skills inherited from his minister father, his musical ability, and his own flair for catching people's attention, ably demonstrated by his success in advertising, MacDonald's poetry readings were often unparalleled events. His delivery was superb: he would whisper, or roar, chant, and sometimes almost sing his verses, and the performance beguiled thousands. Not so easily beguiled were the critics, who dismissed MacDonald as a second-rate poet. MacDonald chose to interpret this lack of critical acceptance as another sign of his genius. He was, he claimed, too advanced, too outspoken, too honest, for the literary establishment's taste.

Yet he managed to convince school boards — seldom noted for progressive tastes in poetry — to hire him to read poetry to students. For many years he entertained youngsters with his verse and his magic. Eventually, personality clashes with the Toronto board resulted in his being banned from schools in that city, but he continued to appear in other schools for some time. He also travelled throughout Canada and the United States, and, on one trip, met Dorothy Colomy. They were married in 1935, and had one child, Ann Meridan.

Towards the end of his life, MacDonald reconciled himself to the fact that he would never be accepted in his native land. He took great consolation in the fact that he was respected outside Canada, although he tended to exaggerate that acceptance. But there is evidence he was well thought of abroad, at least where his poetry was known. One of the highlights of Wilson's career came in 1957, when he was invited to Moscow to help celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the USSR.

The cold war was in full swing, and western perceptions of Russia focussed more on military than cultural matters. The day before MacDonald arrived in Moscow, the USSR launched Sputnik II. On board was a dog, Laika, the first living creature in space.

A portrait of the artist as a young Indian.





The poet in middle life with a friend.

Public Archives of Canada/PA-148002

Canadian newspapers carried reports on the military implications of Russian supremacy in space, along with stories of animal lovers outraged at the cruelty of dooming Laika to death on board the irretrievable satellite. Meanwhile, Wilson MacDonald was experiencing quite a different side of the Russian character.

He had been well known in the USSR for at least thirty years, ever since donating more than \$10,000 earned by his poem, "Volga", to Russian famine relief in the mid-twenties. As MacDonald reported in a booklet, *On My Own in Moscow*, he was warmly welcomed, well fed and comfortably housed at the Leningradskaia Hotel. With other guests, he was entertained at the theatre, ballet and circus, and taken on tours and to parades. On a tour of the university, he slipped away, entered a classroom and talked directly to the students. At a parade, he amused the son of an army officer with magic tricks, and was repaid with a tangerine from the seven-year old boy, a gift that touched Wilson deeply. Seemingly, when he was around children he could forget his position as a poetic genius and reveal the charm most adults only glimpsed.

Of course, MacDonald's poetry was his reason for being in Russia in the first place, and thus he was highly gratified at the reception of his work. He met China's Chairman Mao and Nikita Khrushchev, and found the Russian premier pleasant and friendly. He also met members of the Russian literary community, including Shakespearean scholar Alexander Anikst, who praised his poetry and urged MacDonald to keep in touch after his return to Canada.

MacDonald's Moscow visit lasted ten days, and left him with a favourable impression of the Russian people. Unfortunately, few who had heard him read his poetry agreed with his point of view. His repeated references to the "gentle, peace-loving Russians" upset westerners.

In the last decade of his life, Wilson MacDonald was often ill, and the limitations imposed by old age did little to soften his personality. Still, he continued to write whenever he could, as well as to read his poetry on every possible occasion. He also found time to make a final pilgrimage to his birthplace. In 1960, with members of the Wilson MacDonald Poetry Society, he visited Cheapside and the house where he was born. "The place isn't the same any more", was his verdict.

Five years later, the Poetry Society hosted an 85th birthday celebration for MacDonald in Toronto. When journalist Robert Fulford asked him what his life as a poet had been like, MacDonald responded, "It's been hell... fighting with schools, fighting with critics, fighting with everybody. It's been hell, just hell."

On 8 April 1967, just as Canada's centennial celebrations were getting underway, Wilson MacDonald died of a heart attack in a Toronto hospital. He was buried in Vienna, Ontario, (southeast of London) where he had lived at one time. Three years later, his widow unveiled a plaque marking his birthplace as a historic site. Later, a one-room schoolhouse near Cheapside was turned into a museum and named in his honour.

Early in his career, Wilson MacDonald was hailed as one of the future greats of Canadian poetry. Later, critics dismissed his work as "imitative and hackneyed". Today, he has been largely forgotten. Was he a genius? Was he a dilettante, deluded by his own egoism, but skilled enough to convince others, including Bliss Carman and Lorne Pierce, of his superior talents? Whether, as MacDonald claimed, his work will survive as long as that of Shakespeare or Keats is a matter for future generations to decide. ♦

Cheryl MacDonald has contributed a number of biographical items to The Beaver. She lives in Nanticoke, Ontario. She is the author of a biography of Emma Albani, published by Dundurn Press, but is no relation to Wilson MacDonald.

TONI ONLEY'S ARCTIC JOURNAL

**The celebrated West Coast painter
finds history and haunting icescapes
on voyages through Northern Canada**



9 / April-May 1987

1974

September 1: The Canadian Coast Guard Ship *Louis S. St. Laurent* sailed from Dartmouth at 3:30 p.m. Our destination: Norwegian Bay, 2,330 miles, at a speed of 10 knots for economy of fuel. We headed out of Halifax harbour into fog and a gently rolling sea. At our present speed we will reach Norwegian Bay in 10 days. 2 hours before sunset 12 black-capped (Stormy) Petrels followed us, then disappeared suddenly into the evening dusk as mysteriously and as quickly as they had arrived. We called them "Mother Carey's chickens" when I was a boy on the Isle of Man, maybe because of their moth-like fluttering wing beats just before entering into a long shallow glide. They have long been dreaded by sailors as the warning of impending storm.

September 2: Calm sailing down through the Strait of Belle Isle, with a fresh breeze, clear sunny day and high cirrus cloud. Tonight we move out into the open Atlantic and should meet with larger swells as we head up the Labrador coast. Arctic terns came out to swoop and dive with almost human cries around our ship. As the sun set we sailed between three icebergs larger than our ship, and I could see dozens grounded on the Labrador coast.

September 4: The ice observers have been keeping an eye out for bergs on radar and when they spot a big one on our path they phone me in my cabin. I was up on the upper bridge to photograph two large ones today. We came within a mile of one, even then it completely filled the lens of my camera. By 4:30 p.m., we reached 55° N, about ten miles off the Spotted Islands which I saw before the fog rolled in. It cleared again before sunset.

September 6: New sailing orders came today. We are to rendezvous with the *C.C.G.S. Labrador*, then sail to Resolute to pick up a scientist, then proceed to Coberg Island, Carey Islands and Cape Herschel, in support of the "North Water Project." By 8:00 a.m. we had reached 61°58'W, doing ten knots. The sea last night and this morning is unusually calm. Capt. Fornier tells me he has not experienced such a smooth voyage north for some years. The Labrador coast is famous for foul weather in the fall of the year. When the painter A.Y. Jackson came this way in 1927 with his friend Dr. Fred Banting, he commented, "We took quite a shaking up in sea like a bucking bronco."

For the past three days we have encountered pods of pothead whales. One pod of about twelve converged on the starboard side, then dived beneath us, emerging safely on the port side.

The famous "middle pack" is nowhere in sight. This is the ice barrier that stopped John Davis on his voyage

*The important West Coast painter
Toni Onley has been a frequent
visitor to Canada's northland.
Here we present memories of
two of his northern journeys,
the summer 1986 voyage on the
Canadian Coast Guard Ship
Des Groseilliers, recorded in water-
colour, and his first voyage in 1974
aboard the Louis S. St. Laurent,
recorded in prose as iridescent
as his painting.*

of 1586. When he tried to cross from Greenland to Lancaster Sound they were stopped by large ice-floes, a broken line of ice eight feet thick extending as much as two hundred miles to the west and from Baffin Bay to the south of Labrador. "They drifted with it, a dangerous matter, past Meta Incognita" to the south where they came to "a mighty overfall, with divers circular motions like whirlpools." Davis came home to an England anxiously awaiting him. The dangers he described discouraged England from sending any further expeditions until Hudson's tragic voyage in 1610. Today, sailing is so smooth, and no wind, temperatures in the 40s, that it is more like punting on the Thames. Ships of the whalers have been crushed like matchwood in these waters, this time of year. I have read of men's hair turning grey overnight with sheer terror — and ships being blocked in the "middle pack" for three years. At 1:00 p.m. approximately fifty pothead whales crossed our path followed by hundreds of fulmars flying around over them. They headed southwest towards Hudson Strait.

September 7: We continue in dead calm seas, drifting in and out of fog banks. The temperature has dropped to freezing for the first time, and the chilling fog would cut to the bone if one were to go on deck without a parka. Icebergs emerge out of the fog hourly, each one a surprising new shape.

Men on these voyages often become very depressed if their minds are not kept occupied. This was recognized by Parry aboard the *Hecla* and at Winter

Harbour. "He took great care to promote good health, high spirits and comfort among his men." Fortnightly, the officers would present a farce that had had a successful run in London, for the amusement of the men. They would also produce operettas. They edited a weekly, the *North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle* for their own amusement. All this made the winter pass pleasantly, while various scientific observations went on. On the *Louis*, this tradition carries on, even though it is not quite as creative. We do have blue movies every evening in the officers' lounge. We rendezvous with the *C.C.G.S. Labrador* in a few days to take on thirteen cadets and exchange movies. We don't brew our own beer as Parry's men did in 1820, but we have a good supply of bonded maritime beer, plus any spirits one would wish. The days pass very pleasantly for me while I wait to get into ice and landscape I can paint.

By supper time we were into bleak arctic fog, coming off the ice cold water. I could not see from my cabin to the ship's rail. I said to Blacky, the helicopter pilot, "It does not look like we are going to get off at Cape Dyer to deliver the mail." He said, "Don't be too sure, my friend." By the time we had finished our meal, we had sailed out into a beautiful clear sunset with visibility unlimited. Just three miles off the port bow stood Cape Dyer with towering cliffs, great icebergs beached at their feet, and above snow-clad mountains and glaciers of almost 6,000 feet. The first officer piped, "Helicopter pilot to the flight deck," and we were off. I quickly loaded my camera, only to find on my return that the film had slipped and I didn't get one picture of the magnificent coast as we flew over. It is best in the Arctic to wait until things happen for you. I wait all day to be in sight of land that I can paint, only to find it fogged in, or we arrive after dark. Big bergs show up on radar, and by the time we arrive they are lost in fog. To the east of here on the west coast of Greenland, they have an indispensable Greenlandic word, *imag'a* — "perhaps." All is determined by weather which is uncertain at the best of times.

September 8: We received a message from the *Labrador* in the night. She is coming out of Jones Sound, her captain suggests we rendezvous at Eclipse Sound near Pond Inlet. If we arrive tomorrow morning I should be able to do some painting in the narrow Pond Inlet.

I had a good day of painting at Cape Dyer. We are following the coast; by nightfall we were off Cape Christian. It was cold, and gathering black snow clouds covered the land. The bergs are a ghostly pale green in the black water. A school of killer whales went by at 5:00 p.m. Two of them broke off and came over to investigate us.

September 9: By 8:00 a.m. we were off Cape Adair. The *Labrador* is now in Pond Inlet. It is overcast,

temperature 40°F. and visibility twenty miles to Cape Adair. Lots of big bergs coming down the coast. The sea is so smooth it feels like we are riding at dock, not even a swell! I set up my drawing board in the crow's-nest in the afternoon and did three watercolours of the Baffin Island coast. We came in progressively closer to shore as we approached Pond Inlet. The landscape is very smooth, and sculptured, as though a Henry Moore had shaped it. The mountains are rounded and flow down into glacier valleys, which in turn, wind sinuously down to the sea where the bergs break off like glass into the strait.

September 10: In the morning at 9:00 a.m., we rendezvoused with the *Labrador* in Eclipse Sound, spent two hours transferring thirteen coastguard cadets by helicopter. Earlier, at about 8:00 a.m., we went over to Pond Inlet to pick up Dr. Maurice Haycock, a retired geologist who was A.Y. Jackson's painting companion for many years. We flew around the settlement for a half-hour, but not a soul was out of bed and no one poked a nose out. So we had to go back at 9:30 and get him. I spent most of the morning and all afternoon in my crow'snest studio as we sailed out of Eclipse Sound and out Navy Board Inlet to Lancaster Sound. It was the most successful day's painting to date. I completed twelve watercolours, of bergs, glaciers, mountains and low cloud. I painted the passage from Pond Inlet through to Lancaster Sound. It is now 10:30 p.m., and still light as we head out into Lancaster Sound across the point where the men of Ross's expedition were found, by chance, by the *Isabella* in 1833. They had spent four years in the Arctic, and were making a desperate attempt to escape in long boats from the *Fury* when they were spotted off the end of Navy Board Inlet. From here we head west to Resolute. Still in calm ice-free water. About every hour we steered around a big berg drifting down Navy Board Inlet.

September 11: By 8:00 a.m. we were off Prince Leopold Island heading west in Lancaster Sound in heavy fog and snow. By noon it had cleared and I was able to go up the crow'snest and do two watercolours, one of Prince Leopold Island, still in sight astern of us, and one of Cape Hurd five miles to the north. By 3:00 a.m. we hove to off Beechey Island and went ashore in the helicopter: Dr. Haycock, Dr. Herman (the ship's doctor), Captain Fornier, the chief officer, and myself. The helicopter had to make two trips because Dr. Haycock had his movie cameras and equipment, which took up much room. While I was waiting for the helicopter to return I sighted a cairn on the top of the high south cliff of Beechey Island. This turned out to be the cairn erected by Sir John Franklin in 1845 when he wintered there. It was this cairn that Captain Ommanney, commanding the *Assistance*, sighted in



Iceberg reflection, Rauschenberg, May 31, 1980



SHIP POINT, ADMIRALTY INLET, BRITISH COLUMBIA, JUNE 4, 1961



BLUFF HEAD, BORDEN PENINSULA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, JUNE 4, 1961

his search for Franklin in 1850. Soon ten vessels were assembled at Beechey Island. "Their search revealed evidence of white man's wintering," but no definite proof that it was Franklin, until three graves were discovered about a mile to the west of the main camp. The inscriptions on these graves gave the first clue. They were men off the *Erebus* and the *Terror*. I visited these graves and the painted inscriptions on the wooden headstones (markers?) are still clear and readable after one hundred and twenty-nine years. The mast of the *Mary*, a small sailing vessel which was left in case the party returned, stands at the camp pointing to the north. The remains of the *Mary* lay scattered below at the shore line; nothing left but one side of her, and a few planks. In 1933 a few ribs of her were standing out of the shale as A.Y. Jackson painted her. A few posts of the winter house and one wall still stand, also a stone wall four feet high behind which I saw coal scattered. The whole site was strewn with barrel staves and tin cans. A six-foot cross was laid out on the ground fashioned from these one hundred and twenty-nine year old cans. There was a cairn alongside the Franklin monument; a glass bottle beneath it contained messages from people who had braved it to this spot in the intervening years. I left my own message in an Edgeworth tobacco tin and placed it with the bottle beneath the cairn. These remains become part of the void suspended in time; only we move. The ship was waiting and we had only a short hour at Franklin's winter camp. Dr. Haycock, who is making a film record of historic sites of arctic explorers, told me today of his find of last month. Captain William Penny was ordered to search north for Franklin up Wellington Channel. He wintered at the south end of Cornwallis Island and made sledging trips north along Wellington Channel. At the north end of Cornwallis Island he met with open water across which he sighted Baillie Island, so he sent back for a long boat to get across the narrow stretch of water. This boat was later abandoned, lay on a beach he called Abandon Bay, turned over and left there as they sledged back to camp. Dr. Haycock reasoned that this boat might still be there, so he chartered an airplane and flew up. Sure enough it was there, just as Captain Penny had left it one hundred and twenty-nine years before. The Arctic protects frail evidence for hundreds of years. The only threat to such things of historical importance is man. A hunter will come along soon and pepper Penny's boat with bullets, just as they did to the objects found at Greely's camp at Fort Conger. The Franklin Probe, a twelve-man team, was camped at Beechey Island this summer. They painted the wooden gravestones white: a most insensitive act, bordering on vandalism.

September 12: Anchored in [the] bay, one mile off Resolute. At 11:00 a.m., went ashore with Dr. Hay-

cock. He commandeered a truck and we set off exploring for the day. We visited a Thule culture Eskimo village site that was several hundred years old, then drove out to a point to watch the Beluga whales close to shore. It was 20°F with a gale force biting wind in clear bright sunshine. We had lunch with the glaciologists of the polar shelf project. Then visited the present Eskimo village and browsed around the co-op. The carvings in whale bone were of very poor quality. Some of the walrus and whale bones I found on the beach were of much more interest before the locals had taken these same bones and carved them with stylized faces. Returned to the ship at 5:00 p.m.

We sail tonight at 12:00 with new orders to do hydrographic work in Crozier Strait, between Little Cornwallis and Bathurst Island. While at anchor in Resolute Bay, I did three watercolours from the crows-nest in the evening.

September 13: Sailed west during the night, then north through Intrepid Passage, McDougall Sound, to the entrance of Pullen Strait where we anchored a few hundred feet off the ice edge. It is a crisp clear sparkling morning, a solitary fox walks across the narrow strait on the ice. I headed for my studio atop the mast and by the time I had climbed out on top the fog had rolled in and it was zero-zero. There was consolation however. The sun shone through the low mist and produced a perfectly complete sundog (Parhelis). I have seen these almost daily for the past week; there are particularly sharp and well-defined haloes in the Arctic, often a complete circle, with wide, well-defined bands of colour.

The wind is blowing hard off the pack ice, breaking large chunks off the pack which drift down on the ship, crashing and grinding against our sides, sending shudders throughout the ship as we lie at anchor. The hydrographers have been flying from high point of land to high point of land, setting survey markers. The landscape is low and rolling, appearing and reappearing through the cold mist. It has to be the most desolate spot on Earth. We are about fifty miles east and thirty miles north of the North Magnetic Pole. The reason for our survey apparently is that a large deposit of silver, lead, gold has been discovered. We sailed past the miners' camp earlier today, their coloured tents looking like an Arab encampment in the desert. The wind-blown snow is like fine dust which blows away in the extreme cold as you walk through it. The men at the camp looked like penguins in their great padded parkas banded in bright colours, watching us sail by in the narrow Strait of Pullen. Looking down into the little patch of green-black water we are anchored in, I think it is like standing at the edge of a great cliff: if one were to fall in, it would be almost instant death. I have been told to stay away from places where I

might possibly slip and fall in. It would be all over before one could possibly get back to the ship, and warmth. We could be anchored in this location for four more days, so the hydrographers can complete their survey. I did five watercolours today at the masthead. While I was up there I watched a big walrus on the edge of the ice: he would roll in the snow, lift his head at times with great difficulty, and occasionally slip off the edge into the water to do some fishing. Further up the ice-blocked strait, there is a little more open water which is creating a phenomenon called a *watersky*, the black open water reflects on the underside of the low scudding cloud giving the appearance of a standing black cloud. If it were white it would be called an *ice blink*.

As I look at this seemingly empty landscape, I see more and more. The sky is often a reflection of the land and water. The pale burnt umber hills colour the clouds above. It is possible to read the sky for land or water or ice (ahead of one's ability to see the ground itself). These colour changes in the low cloud are infinitely swift. But once spotted, loom large!

September 14: When one first sees this land, the first thought is that it could not possibly support any life. This is our second day anchored in Pullen Strait, and life is beginning to appear around us. Polar bears with two cubs came out on the ice and played all morning; two seals kept a safe distance on a small floe. I imagine the waters are full of fish. A few days ago when we were approaching Eclipse Sound, the men on the *Labrador* caught one-hundred pounds of arctic char while waiting for us to rendezvous with them. However they didn't give us a fish.

The weather, clouds and light are constantly changing. I often see cloud shadows, patterns in the water, and on the hills, and by the time I have run up to my masthead studio, it has all changed. Many a time I just sit in the crow's nest and watch it all go by hour after hour. Part of the ship's mission is to spot and count whales. I am often the first to see them as a result of my vigil. I had no idea that there would be so much colour in the Arctic; not vivid colour, but pale, gentle and ever-changing. I have discovered it is useless to form impressions of places by the descriptions of others. World as is, and world as described, are two different places. My impression of the Arctic is very different to the one I gained through reading, or speaking to people who have travelled this way. I can see why explorers came back time after time, as if it was in their blood. It was a pleasure like looking up weird words in dictionaries for where [they] may lead. Every corner we turn reveals different shapes, colours and sights, just as the landscape changes before your eyes when you stay in one place. The low cloud drifting across a nearby hill letting sun through, then shutting

it out, changes the hill from heavy black to a light white cloud. Dr. Haycock who has been painting this country for years, and has arctic fever, said to me as I was leaning on the ship's rail and staring into the space, "Some country, eh?"

The surveyors have their survey boat *Widgeon* over the side and work from morning until night, filling in the blank white areas at the top of the map. They have discovered two small islands previously uncharted, which now have to be named and given reality. Ice and land merge making it difficult to tell which is which. Our two new islands were passed by previous cartographers as being ice hummocks — great blocks of ice thrown up in a confusion, or in a Cubist's dream. But, beneath, lay smooth little islands twenty feet high. Arctic charts are not as complete or as accurate as navigators would like. While sailing the east coast of Baffin, north of Cape Dyer, our navigator changed to the next chart north and found us to be ten miles west of our course; all night we had steamed ten miles closer to land than we had thought we were. Fortunately we were twenty miles offshore. I was on the bridge when this was brought to the attention of Captain Fornier. He became very agitated and paced up and down. The navigator said, "Shall I set a new course for Pond Inlet?" The Captain said, "Put me on my original course." So we sail due east for an hour to get back on that track. Whether he was exercising a captain's right to be cussed, or he had good reason to stay well offshore, who knows? I left the bridge quietly.

September 15: The ship's day is being spent steaming back and forth in the head of McDougall Sound taking soundings along parallel lines two cables wide. It's a moody day with very dramatic skies, playing light and colour changes across the smooth water. I spent part of the morning and afternoon in the crow's nest painting and watching. Did five watercolours, including one of Tooke Island which was named by our hydrographers after the skipper of the *MacDonald*. The island looks more like a drifting hummock of ice than land. While we are steaming along at seven knots, taking soundings today, suddenly the water depth went from 104 fathoms to two fathoms. We had discovered a shoal in the middle of the channel. The ship was thrown into reverse and everything not tied down went flying. I'm told these shoals are everywhere in the Arctic, particularly the Beaufort Sea and Western Arctic where *pingos* come up to within a few feet of the surface. These little hidden outcroppings are on proposed oil tanker routes.

September 16: After the hydrographers had finished their day of surveying and the helicopter was free, Dr. Haycock, Dr. Miller and myself flew over to Brooman Point on the east coast of Bathurst Island on Crozier Strait. The remains of a Thule culture settlement are



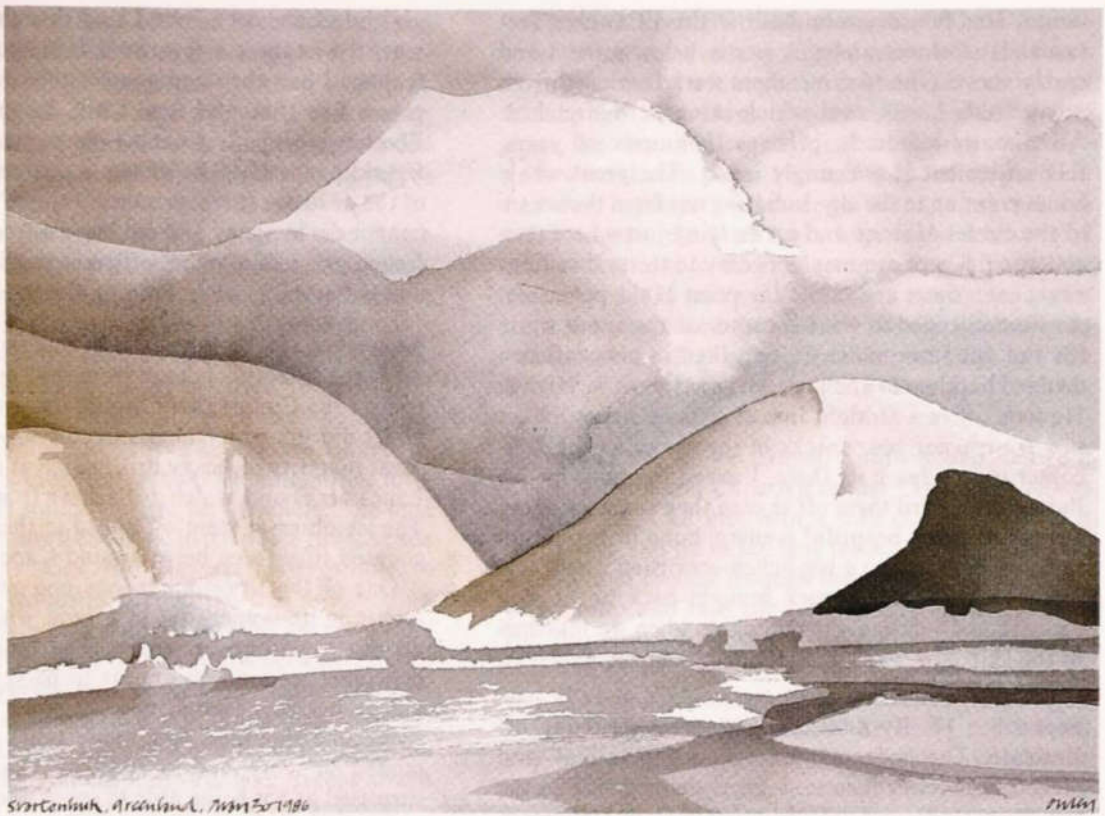
Collier Bay, Alaska Sept 1966

Julien



Scenic at ship point, Admiralty Inlet, British Columbia, June 1986

Julien



there. The houses were built eight to twelve feet (around) of stones and soil, partly below ground and partly above. The roof members were fashioned from great whale bones, over which skins were stretched. After many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, this settlement is amazingly intact. The great whale bones point up to the sky, radiating out from the centre of the circles of stone and earth, lying just where they collapsed. There are maybe twenty to thirty dwellings along each shore and out to the point of the peninsula. As we descended in the helicopter at the site a white fox ran out from under us, and then in his confusion doubled back under and between our skids as we landed. He took off in a straight line as soon as we got out. I saw fresh polar bear tracks in the snow. As the helicopter was to leave us there, I asked the pilot for his flare gun to ward them off in case they came snooping around. It was a beautiful evening, but a little too cold to paint. I picked up a big lichen-encrusted whale vertebrae, which Dr. Haycock brought back to the ship for carbon-14 dating. At midnight, when we returned to the ship, she was already moving out for Resolute.

September 17: By 8:00 a.m., we were steaming off Resolute. The helicopter went in with the mail and picked up a letter for me. I spent the morning in the crow's nest studio and did a painting of Cape Dungeness at the entrance of Wellington Channel as we went slowly by. Our destination is now Thule, Greenland, about fifty hours' sailing along the south shore of Devon Island to Baffin Bay. It has started snowing. I painted in the crow's nest all afternoon and into the evening. We sailed in and out of snow squalls continuously; an ever-changing display of clouds, lights and shadows across the high cliffs of South Devon Island. There is a sharp brittle quality to the landscape, making it ideally suited to watercolour. The complex arrangements of shapes, lights, shadows and colours have to be laid down as quickly as the compositions appear in the eye and mind. I did ten watercolours today, including two of bleak Beechey Island as we returned past it. My Japanese goat hair brushes, my French handmade papers, all come together in the crow's nest of a Canadian icebreaker to make some of the best work I have done in the medium. Time stops as I move silently and with serenity of mind and body through dissolving clouds and brittle rock. If only I could stay long enough. But the season is late, and already new ice, delicate transparent ice, is forming in our path. Soon it will be impassable and not even our powerful ship will be able to budge out of it. Time is now the enemy; we are to be the last ship to return from the Arctic, as we were the last to arrive there. The *Labrador* must almost be home by now, and the *MacDonald* is leaving Resolute for home today.

I watched Beechey Island slip away as we sailed

east into Lancaster Sound, and thought of what I felt when I was there a few short days ago. Of the mixed feelings I had then and now, of the beauty of solitary places like this, and how I am drawn to them. But Beechey is also a frightening place, guarding the great Franklin mystery. The silence is deafening. The spirits of the dead are there, prisoners forever in the ice. Men cannot die in agony and not leave a trace! There is the frozen grave of a young officer who died of frost bite and exhaustion, while hunting for food.

September 18: As the sun rose this morning we were off Cape Sherard. It took from 900 hrs. to 1500 hrs. to pass the Cunningham Mountains on Devon Island, and I did ten watercolours in this time. There was a great quantity of heavy drifting ice at the entrance to Lancaster Sound, which drifts down from Smith Sound. The ice observer went off ahead in the helicopter and counted fifty-three bergs around Cape Sherard.

One of the first impressions one gets of the High Arctic is its immensity. In a land without harbours, we sail to within safe distance of land and take the helicopter ashore. We appear to be very close, as we did at Beechey Island; hove-to under the east wall, rising one thousand feet to its table top. When we landed on shore, and looked back at our ship, I was surprised at not being able to see it, then I saw a little red and white dot, a little puff of smoke, and that was our *Louis*, the largest conventional icebreaker in the world, 13,000 tonnes at \$30 million. The scale is hard to grasp until one spots a building or a village like Pond Inlet. I had difficulty at first locating it without my field glasses, even though we were hove-to only two miles distant. It looked like a scattering of tiny pebbles along the edge of the water. I would never have seen it, had it not been pointed out. The scale of the land is out of all proportion to its inhabitants.

Cape Sherard slipped over the horizon behind us at 2000 hrs. We will spend all tonight and tomorrow until 1700 hrs. reaching Thule, across Baffin Bay.

September 19: When I awoke this morning, we were already among the massive flow of icebergs which drift down the Greenland coast to the Atlantic. The ship had slowed down to manoeuvre around these giants slipping down the sides of the Earth. The sea is lake calm. It's still and quiet like listening to cool chorales; clear magic. I was looking through a glass-bottomed bucket at the permanent world frozen into majestic forms. Stillness rested like light on the great expanse of Baffin Bay. Occasionally a piece from a berg would hit the bow, sending shudders throughout the ship, with the sound of a great temple gong.

The vast expanse of icebergs, changing shapes as we glided slowly through, is too much for the mind and eye to take in at one time. As a painter I can only work on little bits at a time.

After entering the fiord between Wolstenholme and Cape Atholl, I settled down to painting the red stratified sediment rock of the islands, topped with pink snows and ridged cliffs like crumpled red paper, arranged and strewn as accidentally as clouds, grounded icebergs at their feet. I did three watercolours before we docked at Thule.

We pick up Fritz Miller and other of the North Water Project along with their equipment. The American Air Force Base is a collection of aluminum boxes in long depressing rows, connected by umbilical cords of heating pipes, waste pipes and electrical conduits. They are hermetically sealed off from the beautiful harsh land of rock and unending ice cap. Across the bay from the ships' dock lies the Eskimo village, at the foot of black table-top Dundas Mountain. The little Eskimos are all smiles and are very friendly. The men look like scaled-down cowboys, in chap-like pants, made from polar bear skins. But they are hardy people, to have lived for centuries beyond the tree line, beyond the crop line, in a land covered 90% by ice more than a mile deep. Hall called them, "A link between Saxons and seals — hybrids, putting the seals' bodies into their own and then encasing their skin in the seals'." At the edge of the village I can see Knud Rasmussen's little white house, the same as it always was, except now it has electricity — a convenience he never enjoyed.

September 20: Left Thule at 800 hrs. Sailed down Wolstenholme Fiord heading N.W. out into Baffin Bay, once more amongst ghostly bergs on their silent way to haunt the North Atlantic. Our destination is Cape Herschel. We are taking the historic route of William Baffin, who just discovered the North Water on his voyage of 1616 in the *Discovery*. We sailed again under clear skies and calm water, until we rounded Hakluyt Island and met with a head-on gale pushing mountainous waves. These winds come down the fiords of the Greenland ice cap dead ahead of us. Just as they met Baffin in his little ship. As he approached Steensby Land off Cape Leiningen, a severe storm blew. He took refuge in the lee of Hakluyt Island, which "lyeth between two great sounds, the one Whale Sound — 'this sound seemeth to be good for killing whales, it being the greatest and largest in all the bays' — and the other Sir Thomas Smith's Sound; this last runneth to the North of 78°, and is admirable in one respect, because in its greatest variation of the compass of the world known for by divers good observations I found it to be above five points, or fifty-six degrees varied to the westward." We are to arrive at Sir Thomas Smith's Sound by 2,000 hrs. where the scientists of the North Water Project are to take deep water samples in an effort to discover the origin of these waters. We then carry on to Cape Herschel to evacuate the Project's camp. The men have been here for three years.

The coastline of Greenland north of Thule is powerful. It has great variety, rugged capes and deep fiords ending in sharp white glaciers. The rock everywhere is deep red with purple shadows. The eroded gullies down the face of every cliff look as though sharp fingers were drawn down through soft red clay and it had then hardened in this shape. But against the blue black waters, the land looks amazingly soft, topped with pink snows, joining almost imperceptibly with the pink sky. I did seven watercolours in the crowsnest until the sea picked up violently. It was like being at the top of a tall thin tree in a hurricane. I felt like J.M.W. Turner bound to the mast of a ship in a storm to get the feel of it.

September 21: As we entered Smith Sound, between Cape Isabella and Cape Alexander, "the north pillars of Hercules," we met with a wall of ice, much of it multi-year and up to ten feet thick. All night the ship lurched and ground through the ice, stopping at times to back up and ram the old ice, and on occasion to run full speed up onto the ice and slide back down with the ship's propellers still driving full forward. It was like being in an earthquake with no relief all night. It was frightening. I expected the *Louis* to be holed any time, being constantly thrown sideways into the sharp ice. I was not able to sleep, so I got out of my bunk at 5:00 a.m. before I was thrown out. We had almost arrived at our destination. We could not have been far from the North Water Project camp all night, because a flare was sighted at midnight going up from Cape Herschel. Captain Fornier ran her into the ice four miles distant from Pim Island.

Dr. Fritz Muller told me he had landed at Pim Island three years ago in search of a site for the North Water Project. He found what looked like an ideal site but it was covered with graves of white men, buried above ground under piles of stones. They were well preserved, some in sail cloth shrouds and 19th century dress. The foxes and bears had got at some of the bodies.

As soon as it was light enough, our helicopter got to work evacuating the four men, their belongings, and most of the camp. It took until mid-afternoon. It was cold (16°F.), and a 40 MPH wind blew steady down off Leffert Glacier. I spent the day in the crowsnest painting the cape, historic Pim Island, and the wind-swept lenticular clouds whipping up over the Leffert Glacier. The steel floor of the crowsnest hangs out into the wind and is very cold. I have to wear heavy lined boots to keep my feet warm. Today I accidentally dropped my wet watercolour brush on the deck, and it instantly froze to the plate steel. I was able to free it only after sacrificing a few hairs. I was able to do four watercolours. It was among some of the most paintable country so far.

These waters are inexorably linked with efforts to reach the North Pole. The name of every bay, cape,



Lemieux point, Dundas Harbor, Devon Island, June 3, 1986

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sound and fiord is associated with achievement and tragedy. Charles Francis Hall died up here, later his ship, *Polaris*, was holed and sank in ice a short distance south of our location. Nineteen of his crew drifted on an ice floe from 15 October 1872 to 30 April of the following year, and covered a distance of 1,300 miles before being saved off Grady Harbour, Labrador. Major Greely's men slowly starved to death, all but seven of the original expedition of twenty-five. Greely's "Starvation Camp" sits four miles off our bow, its top covered from sight by blowing fine snow. Kane, in his attempt to reach the pole, was forced to winter at Rensselaer Harbour on the Greenland side of Smith Sound just off our stern. Peary came this way on his way to the pole. Rasmussen trekked all over it. I had a spectacular view of our return through the ice from the crow's nest; it was quite a ride. I had to hang on tight until we reached the open waters of Baffin Bay. Our next stop in the evacuation of the North Water Project is Coberg Island at the entrance to Jones Sound.

The days are shortening very fast now. Each day the sun sets perceptibly sooner. The long arctic night begins three weeks from today.

September 22: It was a clear sunny day with visibility unlimited as we entered the ice floes to the north of Coberg Island. A black cloud hung over the island and by the time we reached Cambridge Bay on the south side, the cloud cover was spreading out from the islands' mountain peaks and obscuring all the southern horizon. The helicopter got to work immediately on the ship's arrival to evacuate the North Water Project's three scientists and all their equipment. Dr. Haycock and I were taken onto the island on the second trip of the helicopter and left at the camp site. I could see when we left the ship that the weather was closing in, and there was a good possibility that we might not get back that day. However, I was still anxious to see Coberg Island. The overcast gave it a mysterious look as though it held secrets which could not be seen looking in from the ship. The mountains, steep valleys and glaciers were very inviting. I had to see it. We flew into Cambridge Bay and down a steep sided valley which opened out onto a mile wide plain which swept around a bay about eight miles long. At the south end of this unnamed bay stood the little camp. The helicopter made two trips with sling cargoes before the ceiling dropped down to obscure the approach valley. Our pilot could not return and we were trapped until the weather improved. We were seven: Dr. Haycock, Dr. Fritz Muller, head of the North Water Project, four students from the University of Zurich, and myself in a very small cabin. Fortunately, the two beds and box of sleeping bags had not been taken out in the first few trips of the helicopter. We had food and a stove which took the chill off the small cabin; our body

heat did the rest. At night, the wind got up to 40 knts. and the temperature went down to 0°F. New grease ice streaked across the bay, pale green on the black water; it smoothed the waves like oil on water. The wind whirled the fine snow around the cabin in great drifts. It came in every crack and sprinkled my face as I lay on the floor in my sleeping bag; it stung like salt on an open wound.

September 23: When I awoke it was strangely still, the wind had died completely away. I dressed and went out, while the others slept on, some on the floor, one under the table, one on a shelf. The snow had drifted around the cabin creating beautifully carved ridges trailing away from the corners. Two little spiral mounds of snow moved and out popped two husky dogs.

The bay was the strangest place I had ever seen. Its beauty was supernatural and gave me an uneasy feeling of awe. Huge blocks of ice floated, packed together. The sky was black and low. The ice blocks had a ghost-like green-blue glow, as though they were lit up from the inside. I felt as though I were standing in a great enclosed hall like the blue grotto at Capri.

I took a number of walks during the day to make notes to draw from in the cabin. It was far too cold to work outside without gloves. One of the huskies ran along and kept me company. It turned out the other one had two week-old pups, and so stayed behind the cabin curled up in the snow with her babies. The dogs were brought over from Greenland to keep the polar bears away from the camp. But they became pets, lost a lot of their natural fighting instinct, and allowed one bear to get to the cabin early one morning a few days ago. One of the men inside jumped out of bed and grabbed a gun. When the bear smashed in the cabin window, he fired off a shot, creasing the window frame, and the bear took off, leaving the dog barking around the other side of the cabin.

Night came with no sign of our helicopter. We settled into a good supper and bread baked by one of the boys. Over coffee I listened to tall arctic tales. Dr. Muller told us how a German weather station was set up in northern Greenland during the Second World War, manned by twenty men. They came across the ski tracks of Danish explorer Lange Koch, and tracked him down. Koch held them off singlehanded until a sledge patrol came along and captured all but two, who died in the shooting. Dr. Haycock, who is an authority on arctic history, gave us a run-down on the explorers of this area of the Eastern Arctic, stories about the wild bush pilots of the early days when he and A.Y. Jackson and Dr. Banting roamed the Arctic in search of subjects. Once we heard a plane and we all ran out, but we later discovered it was the weather-observing Electra on its way to Thule, high above the clouds droning away from us.

During the day I did five drawings on paper I found in the cabin. My own drawing supplies were left behind on the ship. I was beginning to get into a routine and getting used to the cold and not minding the cool cabin as much. Another day had passed and still no let-up in the low ceiling and obscured valley to the camp.

September 24: We were awakened from sleep by the chop-chop-chop of our helicopter. We all ran out in our longjohns and waved and shouted. They had not left us as we had feared, because we knew the *Louis* was dangerously low on fuel and was eating up thirty tonnes a day just waiting to get us off Coberg.

We were back at the ship in time for a good breakfast. The helicopter finished picking up everything at the camp and we sailed for the Carey Islands by noon. I spent most of the day in my warm crow's nest studio painting the mountains of Coberg and the rocks to southeast of the island called Princess Charlotte's Monument as we sailed east.

I was to learn later that the husky dogs had been destroyed. I was told that there was no alternative, they could not be set loose on the island to breed into a pack. They could not be taken back to Thule, being a foreign country, they would have to be imported, involving red tape, and no home for them there. We would only be stopping at Thule for a few hours at most. We could not give them away in Resolute. Canadian Eskimos don't use dogs, they use Ski-dos. The Greenland Eskimo is the only one still using dogs, and they would have no use for dogs that had been made into pets. As many as five hundred dogs at Jakobhavn Greenland are shot every summer by police because they get loose and are very dangerous. Nevertheless, I enjoyed these dogs during my short stay on Coberg and it took the wind out of me to hear of their end. Shot and left to be eaten by bears. Nothing can be buried in the Arctic; even humans are food for bears and fox.

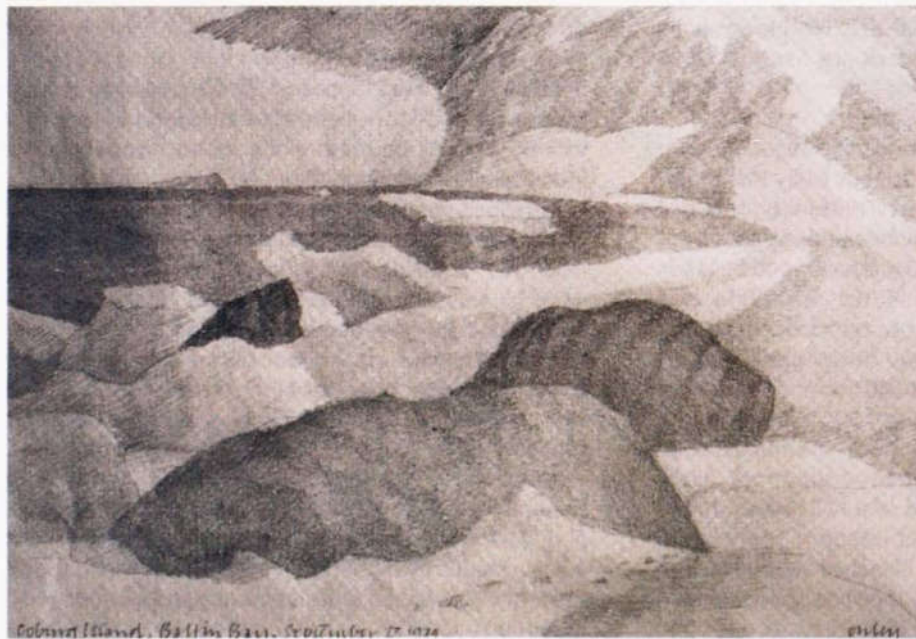
September 25: Thirty-knot wind, overcast and cold when we arrived at the Carey Islands early this morning. The Careys are about thirty miles west of Cape Parry, Greenland, and, like Greenland, belong to Denmark. There were two men and one woman to be taken off with their equipment. I took the first flight over with Dr. Fritz Muller in order to spend the day there photographing while cargo was being slung over by the helicopter. The camp was on the main island of the group of five. They are very rocky islands; I was constantly climbing up and down over rocks and through snowdrifts at the bottom of grey rock peaks whose tops were swirled by cold mist. The coast around the site was a mass of beached icebergs. I scrambled around the island over rocks bleached with cold into colours of pale rosy umbers. I slipped once and shinned myself badly but my legs were so frozen with the snow

I didn't feel it, and forgot all about it until someone later noticed my blood-soaked pants. The North Water Project camp here was a well kept home, the touches of the female member, Anna Marie, were everywhere from lamp shades to a neat well-organized kitchen. The walls were covered with maps of the area, and pictures, and as at Coberg Island Camp, the Christmas decorations of last year still hung on the ceiling. High above the tree line, they had drawn a Christmas tree on the wall and taped decorations and candies to it. The quote of the year was taped to the wall: "The helicopter is coming on Wednesday." These three had not left the island for a year. There was much excitement, laughter, and everyone talking in Swiss-German at the same time. We had hot soup, and they all excitedly filled in the news of the last year, what they had accomplished on Carey, and Fritz filled them in on the overall project and how it was going. As we sat around warm in our company, Fritz looked out the window and said "It looks like we stay a while." It was snowing hard and flying visibility was zero. It looked like Coberg Island all over again, but it cleared in an hour. Then the wind got up with the sun and blew so hard the helicopter could not leave the deck of the *Louis*. It looked like we were stranded but the wind dropped to 35 kts. and we got to the ship before dark. A black raven; the Arctic's largest "songbird" gave us a send-off from the roof of the abandoned cabin. We will be in Thule again tomorrow.

That night the northern lights put on a great display like organ pipes; oddly enough in the Arctic the northern lights are seen in the south. This display coincided with a radio blackout. Dr. Muller tells me it had been his observation that the aurora puts on its biggest display every nine years. 1962 was a good year, and so was 1971 . . . and supposedly 1980 will be.

September 27: We stopped at Thule just long enough to drop off Dr. Muller and his fourteen scientists who will fly on to Trenton in a Canadian Armed Forces Hercules this morning.

We sailed out again as soon as we had dropped them at the dock, destination Lancaster Sound and Resolute. Our departure again was through the drifting icebergs, all new and different shapes this time. Their colours change from one horizon where they are grey-blue to the other horizon where they are verdian green. I did three watercolours before lunch at which time we ran headlong into a hurricane. It came on us so suddenly I was surprised. For after nearly a month of continual sailing, with hardly a wave to rock the ship, suddenly we were in forty-foot waves with wind whipping surf from their tops. Great waves crashed into our port side rolling our ship over 45°. I rushed to my cabin to secure the furniture, books and my cameras. I was busy clearing everything into drawers when in



comes the boatswain to tell me he had to send a man up the mast to secure a stool I was using up there. I thought immediately of my paint box, field glasses and supplies I had up there and that if they were not already smashed they soon would be. I climbed the mast swinging to the waves like a giant baton. I could only climb a couple of rungs of the ladder at a time between rolls; it took some time to reach the top, one hundred feet above the waterline. My painting gear was still in one piece, I tied it down and stayed up in the crow's nest for half an hour for the wild ride. When I came down I went on the bridge. There was Captain Fornier, happy to be using his sea legs again. He walked back and forth across the bridge singing a little French song in time with the roll. It was partly for my benefit, because he came over all smiles and said, "I was beginning to think, Toni, this ship would never roll in the waves again. Why, last year, every time we came out of the ice we were in a storm." Supper was impossible with dishes sliding off the table and every seventh wave would produce a resounding crash from the galley. I wrapped my cold supper in a napkin and retired to my cabin to dine in peace. I went to my bunk early because standing was dangerous. I read until midnight and then the storm picked up with 60 mph wind. We were now breaking green water and the ship rolled in a 70° arch. I wedged two life jackets under the outside edge of my mattress to prevent myself from being thrown out of the bunk. The heavy captain's chair jumped out of its lashings, and sailed across the cabin, striking my bunk. It took a half hour to secure it again, with my two large suitcases flying around and knocking me over every time I thought I had it in hand. What a night! I will always remember Baffin Bay.

September 28: This morning we are out of the worst of it and heading into Lancaster Sound. I am now considering this to be calm compared to last night. It is snowing heavily and there is little to see but the great rolling waves immediately around the ship. It is impossible to paint because of the pitch and roll. The short Arctic summer is over. I plan on leaving the *Louis S. St. Laurent* at Resolute, and flying home as there will be no good painting weather from now on. I spent the day crating my painting supplies and excess baggage to be shipped to me when the *Louis* docks at Dartmouth on 15 October.

This has been an extraordinary voyage, a full month of painting in God's country, his private preserve; and not forsaken as some would have it.

September 29: The *Louis* is anchored in Resolute Bay and will be waiting here for three to five days to escort the *Arctic Explorer*, a hydrography ship, out when she finishes her work around Bathurst Island. Ice is forming like lily pads across the bay. I watch it growing by the hour. This morning it was a few streaks of grease

ice; in the space of six hours the whole bay has joined up into one sheet. By the time the *Arctic Explorer* joins the *Louis*, she will be pushing out through feet of ice. I flew ashore this morning and made my reservation home on Nordair: tomorrow at 12:50, weather permitting. This evening I had supper with Captain Fornier, the Chief Engineer, and Dr. Muller, and was entertained by stories of past glories of icebreaking in the Arctic, of humane journeys to save caribou trapped in the ice, of a twenty mile voyage made to take an arctic hare off an ice floe and put it ashore, of polar bears that followed the *Louis* for miles across the ice of Norwegian Bay to be fed by the crew as she steamed north to Eureka, of all the contradictions the Arctic is constantly presenting to the visitor, like being able to reach out and touch hills one hundred miles away. These men may be hardnosed engineers, but they all have arctic fever and would not give it up for a ship to the South Seas. They may have difficulty at times expressing it, but, from time to time, the iron-hardened sailors aboard would come out with perceptive and sensitive insights into the nature of the Arctic. They grumble and complain as sailors will, but from time to time the everyday affairs of working a ship are put aside for a moment of reverie in the sheer splendor of it all.

I'm going to miss it, and I'm going to come back, one way or another. The people of the Arctic are changing, but the landscape is permanent.

[Toni Onley did return to the Arctic, his latest visit taking place in June 1986 aboard the Canadian Coast Guard Ship *Des Groseilliers*. Paintings from this recent journey are reproduced with this journal and on the cover of this issue.] ♦

Toni Onley, the celebrated Canadian West Coast painter, is represented in many private and public collections in Canada and abroad. He lives in Vancouver and often flies his own aircraft into the wilderness on painting expeditions.

THE GREEN HILL PARK

Disaster

At lunchtime on 6 March 1945, the sturdy building where I worked, a mile from Vancouver's biggest docks, shook from a powerful rumbling, then shuddered as two strong explosions, followed by a lesser one, rocked the city. Thousands of downtown windows were shattered, and flying glass slashed many on the busy streets. Over the roof-tops smoke rose from the direction of Canadian Pacific's pier B-C, and in the streets below emergency vehicles roared by, responding to the city's first general alarm.

Within minutes, the radio reported that a ship had blown up and was burning fiercely as tugboatmen struggled to tow her away from the docks. That ship was the *S.S. Green Hill Park*, and the explosions and fire had taken the lives of two seamen and six longshoremen. Ironically, this ship of death had been named for a peaceful picnic ground at Alma, a village in central Nova Scotia.

A disaster like this had never happened before on the British Columbia coast and public reaction was swift. The mayor and the attorney general made immediate demands on the federal government for a full and open enquiry. They wanted no part of what one client of mine called the "heavy veil of secrecy" that he feared from shipping and harbour officials. The newly formed International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union Local 501 and the Canadian Seamen's Union won public prominence as they helped to expose lax ship-loading and port management practices. They began collecting evidence from witnesses; the media, normally indifferent or hostile to union activity, gave good coverage to their highly pertinent questions: why had those in charge of loading the ship failed to observe the safety regulations? Why were tonnes of explosive and inflammable cargo illegally stowed together? Why was no one warned of the danger?

Ottawa promptly appointed three former maritime men as a commission of enquiry. Justice Sidney Smith presided, assisted by Captain Samuel Robinson and Steamship Inspector Hugh Robinson, both retired. (They were unrelated.) Smith played the dominant role. A disarmingly bland man, he had been a sea captain, a marine lawyer, and a Liberal politician. His soft-spoken Scottish burr cloaked canny and an iron will. It was inadvisable to try to cross Justice Smith.

Fortunately, Ottawa appointed a dynamic, non-establishment lawyer to act as Commission counsel. Dugald Donaghy worked long and hard to prepare for the hearings. The unions instructed me to represent them in the public phase of the enquiry (it began in secret) and to cooperate with Donaghy. We worked well together.

In preparing my case, I found out from eye witnesses everything I could about the ship, her cargo, the way it was stowed, the outbreak of fire and attempts to fight it. I tried to ascertain why some men escaped while others could not. Two longshoremen told me how it felt to be trapped aboard, facing what they believed to be certain death. The slipshod way some shipping and stevedore companies as well as government agencies treated their responsibility for the safety of men, cargoes and the Port of Vancouver itself became increasingly apparent to me.

During World War II Canada had built nearly four hundred merchant vessels at public expense; the *Green Hill Park* was one of these. Completed in November 1943, the ship (a 10,000-tonner) belonged to the Park Steamship Company Limited, a corporation wholly owned by the federal government. Park's general manager was Vancouver shipping magnate Ernest Farquhar Riddle, who was also owner and director of Canada Shipping Company Limited, based in British Colum-

It was noon, 6 March 1945, in Vancouver — and then all hell broke loose

A MEMOIR BY JOHN STANTON

bia. The other owners and directors of Canada Shipping were Sherwood Lett, a lawyer (later a chief justice), and D. E. Harris, a grain broker. Acting as Park's general manager, Riddle gave Canada Shipping (i.e., himself) a contract to operate the *Green Hill Park*. The actual management was entrusted to businessman Kenneth Montgomery, who hired Empire Stevedoring Company to load the vessel. The longshoremen were its employees; the seamen worked for the Park company.

The ship was divided into six compartments, five for cargo and one for the boilers and engines. Each had a lower compartment (hold) some thirty feet deep and an upper one only eight feet deep; this upper one was called the "tween decks". No. 3 hold was amidships, under the bridge and forward of the engines. It measured about fifty feet square. The explosions occurred in the tween decks of No. 3, near the starboard side of the ship and away from the dock. The bulkhead separating No. 3 from No. 2 was torn out, killing five longshoremen who were still in No. 2 and one man trying to escape from No. 1. Two seamen perished in a cabin above the site of the explosion.

Less than three weeks after the disaster the commission's secret sessions were over, and the eighteen-day-long public phase of the enquiry began. The commissioners had power to impose penalties on anyone named as a party if they found him at fault. The transport ministry initially named twenty-two individuals as parties, three being senior personnel from Canada Shipping, two from Empire Stevedoring, and two from Canadian Pacific. Six ship's officers, four longshoremen and five others, including Port Warden Captain Carl R. Bissett, were also named. The unions and the Harbours Board became active parties "by voluntary appearance"; watching briefs were held by the Shipping Federation, an employer group, and the Canadian

Merchant Service Guild, a union of ship's officers.

Three key men and two key companies were *not* made parties. These were significant omissions because only parties could be punished. If there was to be a cover-up, this was where to look for it. One non-party was John A. Wright, captain of *Green Hill Park* who was found "gravely in default". Two other non-parties were Riddle and his company, Canada Shipping. The failure to name them was particularly strange because three of Canada Shipping's senior men in Vancouver were all found blameworthy. The other significant non-parties were the CPR and its pier superintendent, Arthur Willoughby. Ultimate responsibility for deciding who would, and who would not, be named as parties lay with the minister of transport, a Liberal politician.

Eleven lawyers were on the case. Apart from Donaghy and myself, they were the bluebloods of British Columbia's legal profession, true members of the establishment, including four future judges, a future tycoon, and a future Lieutenant-Governor: C. H. Locke, C. K. Guild, J. H. McMullen, C. L. McAlpine, A. C. DesBrisay, W. S. Owen, Sherwood Lett and John Valentine Clyne.

The commission had to answer twenty-seven questions. Most were directly in point and made whitewashing of any party difficult, although non-parties were something else. The unions were particularly interested in five questions: (1) How was the dangerous cargo packed, labelled, and stowed? (2) Were sufficient instructions issued by Canada Shipping to the ship's officers, the longshoremen, and their employer, to take precautions against fire and explosion? (3) Were all, or any, of those involved in loading fully aware of the danger of the cargo? (4) What caused the fire, explosions and loss of life? and (5) Was anyone careless, incompetent or lax, and if so, who?

Months earlier, the Australian government had



Tugs tow away a blazing timber barge as smoke darkens the sky.

begun acquiring items of cargo for shipment on the *Green Hill Park* and sent a detailed list to Canada Shipping. Before the actual loading could begin, Canada Shipping had to have plans showing precisely where each item of cargo was to be stowed. It entrusted this exacting job to Thomas Heward, its superintendent of cargo or "supercargo". His plans had to be approved by the ship's first officer, whose job it is to see that the cargo is well balanced or "trimmed", and that incompatible cargoes are not stowed together. The purpose is to ensure safety for ships and crew in port and at sea, and indeed safety for the port itself. The company began loading on 27 February 1945 at Canadian Pacific Pier B-C, only a hundred metres from major downtown buildings.

Lumber, newsprint and tin plate comprised the great bulk of the cargo, but there were also many other goods, among which three should have attracted special attention: ninety-four tonnes of sodium chlorate, lesser amounts of overproof whisky, and distress flares. The sodium chlorate and the whisky were particularly dangerous, but Charles Hazen, a chemist, insisted the chlorate was not responsible for the explosions, and G.S. Eldridge, a chemical engineer, declared it seldom

caught fire. Both men were witnesses for Canada Shipping and the ship's officers; minimizing the importance of the chemical was in their interest. Said the commission: "We were not impressed with . . . Eldridge and still less with Hazen. These two gentlemen . . . were wedded to their own views and were less than convincing." The commission did accept evidence by three other scientists, however, including chemistry professor M.J. Marshall, who explained that sodium chlorate is "similar to gunpowder in effect and does damage at a distance out of proportion to that at the scene." This is why downtown buildings had shaken and windows had broken.

The whisky was not, said one witness, what "you gentlemen drink"; it was sixty per cent proof, and its vapour was highly explosive. It had come from a distillery in eastern Canada. "When you get whisky into a ship, you have trouble," according to George Hayes, a marine surveyor. He considered it more dangerous than the chemicals, as longshoremen are always tempted to "get at" it, and if there are leaks (for whatever reason), the fumes are extremely inflammable. Sodium chlorate and overproof whisky, therefore, are not good travelling companions.

Five weeks before the explosions, 1,785 small steel drums from three Canadian Pacific boxcars had been unloaded at the pier. Stencilled dimly on some was a warning: "Sodium-chlorate, highly inflammable under certain conditions. See instructions inside." Arthur Willoughby of the CPR consulted explosives inspector D.W. McNab, who told Willoughby that the substance was indeed dangerous and that each drum should have had a yellow warning label attached by the manufacturer, a firm in Buckingham, Québec. In fact, the shipment had crossed Canada without a single label. Regulations forbade chlorate to remain on any pier for more than forty-eight hours. Since the ship was not due to load for more than a month, Willoughby's superiors ordered the drums taken to freight yards at Coquitlam, some fourteen miles away, where an explosion would do less damage.

The yellow labels were never affixed. Asked if he had told Canada Shipping about the missing labels or about the dangerous nature of the chlorate, McNab gave the normal response of a bureaucrat: "No, that was not my function." Nor did Willoughby pass his information to anyone outside Canadian Pacific. The commission commended Willoughby for his action. Neither he nor McNab was criticized for inaction. A word from either of these men could well have altered the course of events.

For Canada Shipping's manager, Kenneth Montgomery, details of loading were of small concern; his job was to make money to enrich Riddle. According to his counsel, he acted "as any reasonable businessman would". He knew that ships in port earn no dollars. Quick loading was therefore desirable, which may be why he took almost no notice of a recent letter addressed to his company by the British Government's Ministry of War Transport. It complained of vessels loaded in Canada that contravened British safety rules and pleaded that dangerous cargoes be properly handled. With it were regulations and a ministry "Notice to Shipowners and Ship Masters re Carriage of Dangerous Goods in Ships":

Not more than ten tonnes of sodium chlorate must be stowed in any one hold.

Sodium chlorate must be stowed away from explosives [such as flares], with the ship's engine-room compartment separating them;

Sodium Chlorate must be stowed away from *any* combustible material.

Although not legally binding in Canada, these rules were viewed by the Commission as binding because they stated principles essential to safe cargo storage.

All Montgomery did with these documents was to put them on the desk of his marine superintendent, Alexander Galt. Later the commission disagreed with Montgomery's contention "that . . . as head of the firm

he could not be expected to attend to details . . . But this was not a detail. It was a matter of prime importance in the business of a shipping company — the safe carriage of cargoes . . . We are unable to see that Mr. Montgomery can be cleared of fault."

Galt, like his superior, was indifferent to the British warnings. He testified in an off-hand manner: "They may have been filed away . . . I don't know." Yet Galt was once a supercargo himself and should have known that sodium chlorate was dangerous. Donaghy questioned him closely. Asked why he had not warned Heward, Galt explained, "He is a supercargo, same as I am, and ought to know". Donaghy pursued the matter:

Q. Why didn't you call the attention of the ship's officers or the supercargo to [the danger ?]

A. I told Mr. Heward it was for tween decks stowage and he took it up with the officers.

Q. May I take it you are not able to say why you did not point out the goods were dangerous, to the officers and supercargo?

At this point there were strenuous objections from Galt's counsel. They were overruled because "after all, it's a very pertinent question."

A. I'm not in a position to tell the officers. It's the duty of the supercargo.

Q. Is that your full answer?

A. Yes.

As for stowing many tonnes of chemicals, whisky, flares, and all sorts of wood, cloth and paper together in the No. 3 tween decks, Galt said it was "perfectly all right". He also complained, "I had only one compartment for this general cargo." The statement was untrue. The cargo plans prepared on Galt's instructions by Charles Heward showed Nos. 4 and 5 tween decks empty. Notwithstanding these facts, Montgomery claimed, "Galt is one of the most competent men on the waterfront." The commission was "not so sure that Mr. Galt was wholly competent in the stowage of cargoes. No doubt he was efficient in the stowage of ordinary peace time cargo moving through Vancouver . . . but with respect to chemicals he had little knowledge . . . We think Mr. Galt should have given the closest attention to the aforesaid circular letter, and drawn it to the notice of Mr. Heward."

If Galt's performance was unimpressive, so was Heward's. He had been told by Galt that the sodium chlorate must be stowed in the tween decks (where access is easier in case of fire), but he neither asked, nor even wondered, why. He had no idea that the chlorate was dangerous, nor that the CPR had sent it to Coquitlam for that reason. He prepared the detailed loading plan. Galt approved it and paid no further attention to the cargo or its stowage. Heward did leave copies of his plan for Captain John Wright and First

Officer Alan Horsfield, but had no discussion with either of them and assumed they approved the plan. In fact, Heward passed on no information to the officers apart from his cargo plan. Understandably the commission thought "that . . . both Mr. Galt and Mr. Heward failed in the reasonable discharge of their duties." In Heward's case the finding was tempered by this comment: "We have a great deal of sympathy for Mr. Heward . . . almost all others sought to shift the responsibility to his shoulders. We are sure he did his best, but his best, for this cargo, was not good enough."

Chief Officer Horsfield had authority to overrule Heward's plan, but his powers meant little to him. He visited No. 3 once but "... did not realize that the ship was loading dangerous cargo. [He], like the Master, left stowage to the supercargo [and so] failed to realize his duties." With regard to the whisky, "... apart from . . . the other dangerous cargo, there should have been a fully competent person in the tween decks watching stowage all day . . . Herein the Chief Officer also failed in his duty." As for punishment, "Horsfield's default . . . would have obliged us to [suspend] his certificate . . . [but] we took into account his gallant conduct after the explosions and also the fact that the system under which he worked left stowage almost wholly in the hands of the supercargo . . . [As] we were unable to deal with Captain Wright's certificate, we thought it fair [to let Horsfield's stand]."

Then what of Captain Wright? He was not on duty at the time of the explosions but volunteered a very strange story to the commission. He said he spent "hours" studying the cargo list, Heward's stowage plan and two books on stowage. He learned that sodium chlorate was dangerous. He overlooked a warning that the chlorate must not be stowed with any combustibles and wrongly decided that the sodium could be stowed with the flares, which were explosives. When it was pointed out that, contrary to everything stated in the books and the rules, he was preparing to load an unholy jumble of chlorate, silicide, flares, whisky, drugs, bronze powder, pickles and quantities of inflammable material all in one hold, Wright admitted he knew the danger. But, like Montgomery, he claimed that wartime meant taking cargoes as presented, dangerous or not: there was no option.

He went further. Once at sea he planned to watch No. 3 tween decks carefully. If fire broke out, he could order the crew to abandon ship, after which he and a few officers would close all apertures and try to douse the fire with steam. The officers were then to take to the boats and observe the results from a safe distance. That a captain could concoct such a plan shows a lively imagination, but the commission was far from enthusiastic: "Captain Wright was fully alive to the potential danger . . . but we are unable to accept his evidence



A plume of thick smoke rises over the Vancouver skyline. The Marine Building is at the extreme left.

at face value . . . [if he was so apprehensive] as to contemplate . . . such extreme measures . . . at sea, he should have taken steps to mitigate the danger, . . . but did nothing . . ."

The commission scorned Wright's macho notion that wartime necessity justified his plan. "Such a proposition has only to be stated to be refuted." It was "... impossible to acquit Captain Wright of default. On the contrary . . . his indifference to the nature and stowage of the cargo constituted grave delinquency on his part . . . We reject at once his reason for putting all this inflammable material into No. 3 tween decks (so they would) be accessible . . . during the voyage."

Former sea captain Carl R. Bissett also testified. After retiring from the sea, he had become a private marine surveyor, and was also the federal government's Port Warden for Vancouver. This latter job made him responsible for checking the seaworthiness of certain ships before allowing them to go to sea. His dual function caused confusion. With regard to *Green Hill Park*, he considered himself an advisor to Canada Shipping, though that company denied relying on him. When No. 3 tween decks was being loaded, Bissett found out from Heward what was in the steel drums, checked two books on stowage, and thought all the cargo well stowed. He even assured the commission that if and when loading ended, he would have certified the ship as seaworthy. Strangely, the books consulted by Bissett say exactly the opposite of the conclusion he drew from them. Even after eight men had died he still insisted that the No. 3 tween decks was well stowed and ignored repeated opportunities to retract.

As port Warden, Bissett had no authority at all to issue certificates of seaworthiness for ships with cargoes like the *Green Hill Park*. Yet for nineteen years he had done so. The commission was "at a loss to understand how Bissett could come to the conclusions he did (about the stowage being safe) . . . in the teeth of all the authorities. Although in fact he had neither authority nor duty to inspect stowage and give certificates, having assumed such authority, he failed, and must be held gravely in default."

Theories about the cause of the fire were suggested by some witnesses: sabotage, an incendiary bomb, spontaneous ignition, and friction. These were rejected immediately by the commission. As for a cigarette, there was much evidence. The employers spoke of the difficulty in getting men to stop smoking. Union witness George Sickavish, who barely escaped from *Green Hill Park* with his life, told of a recent union meeting which decided that anyone who smoked in a ship's hold would be fined a hundred dollars and lose his job. Percy Cavanagh, working on deck, had a good view into much of No. 3 tween decks: "I am completely satisfied in my own mind that no one smoked in the tween decks the day of the explosion or on the day before . . . many of the men below came up on deck to smoke." Six longshoremen confirmed Cavanagh's statement. Two neither confirmed nor denied it. The commission did not believe it had been told "the whole

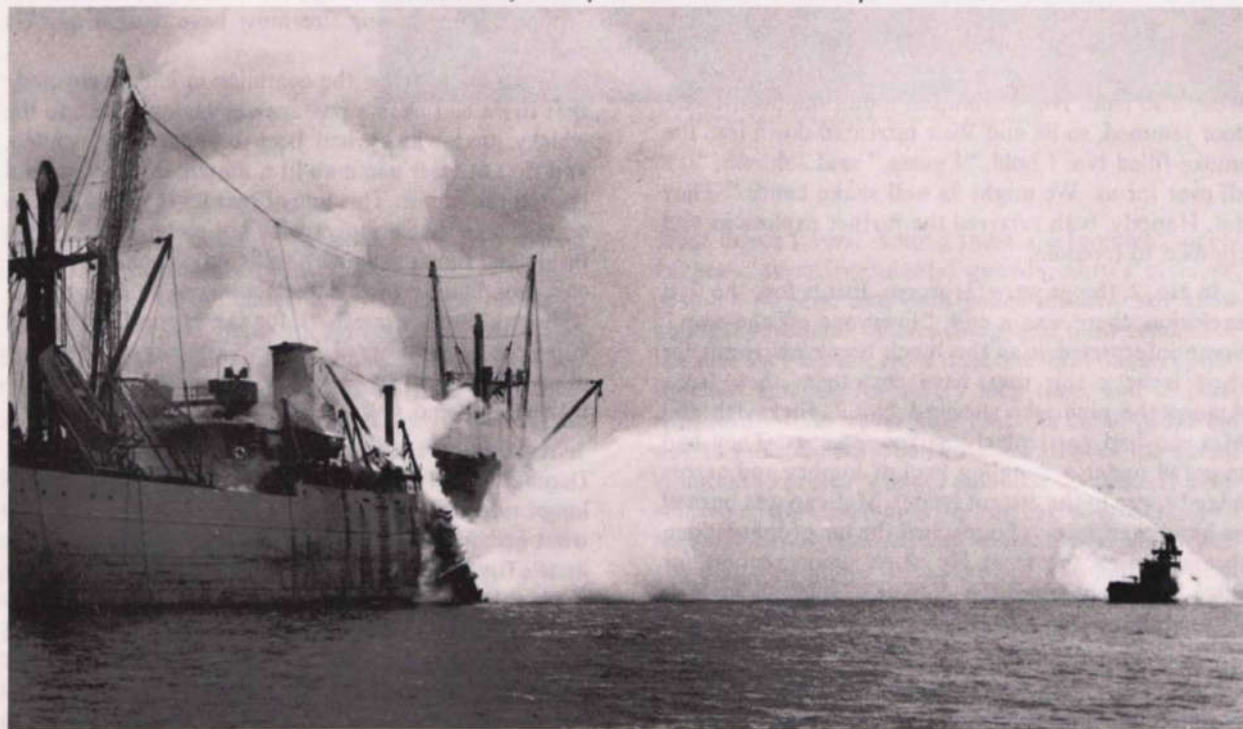
story". It decided that "there was smoking" and that some men "were not telling the truth". This finding turned out to be unimportant for reasons that will soon be clear.

Aboard ship, the first sign of trouble had come in No. 3 tween decks. Longshoreman Russell Drummond heard his foreman George Pottinger ask if there was a fire and "saw smoke on the starboard side near the corner of the cargo . . . there was quite a bit of it . . . The chief officer came rushing down . . . two fire extinguishers were used and then the hose . . ."

John Adank, another man in No. 3, also saw the smoke. He removed an item of cargo, emptied a fire extinguisher, and then helped Drummond, Harry Buckholtz and Stanley Harris to play a hose towards the smoke. It was not hot, nor could flames be seen. However, the "smoke got very thick and the hose got out of control and knocked me down. I got up and asked where the ladder was and someone said, 'Over here.' I climbed out. On the way up I heard a fierce 'sizzling' sound. Just after I got out . . . the first explosion took place. I was the last man out of that hold." Robert J. Cripps, another longshoreman from No. 3, noted the great difficulty experienced by the four men who had tried to get to the source of the fire through large amounts of cargo.

While Adank barely made it up the short ladder and onto the deck, no one from No. 3 tween decks was

The Vancouver fire boat pours water onto the stricken ship.



Vancouver Maritime Museum

trapped, and, except for Adank, none suffered injuries. However, he and his fellow firefighters got small thanks. The commission viewed their efforts as "unrealistic and unconvincing. The seamanlike thing to do in such a case is to burrow at once into the seat of the fire and play the extinguisher or hose directly upon that. But they spoke vaguely of pulling one or two cases down, and directing the extinguisher over the top of the cargo . . . The impression this evidence left upon us was that some of them at least knew then that the fire was of a serious nature, and could not be quenched. And such, of course, was the fact." One wonders why the commission expected seamanlike expertise from longshoremen, who are not trained to fight shipboard fires but who risked their lives trying to extinguish this one.

All six longshoremen who died had been working in the lower parts of Nos. 1 and 2. To reach the comparative safety of the deck these men had to climb forty feet up vertical ladders, whereas those in the tween decks had only eight feet to climb. There may have been confusion about warnings to those in Nos. 1 and 2, but William F. Lewis did reach deck level from No. 1. His death resulted, in part at least, from a defect in the design of one part of the ship.

Sickavish testified that the ladders from Nos. 1 and 2 led to a narrow passageway inside a mast-house. When one door was open, the other had to remain closed. It was a "natural firetrap" into which Lewis stepped at just the wrong moment, for the steel door which he was about to open so as to pass onto the deck was hurled inwards by the force of the second explosion. His body was found in the mast-house. Behind him on the ladder were Thomas Johnson and N.K. Weir, also from No. 1. Johnson found the mast-house door jammed, so he and Weir retreated down into the smoke-filled No. 1 hold. "I guess," said Johnson, "it's all over for us. We might as well shake hands." They did. Happily, both survived the further explosions and climbed to freedom.

In No. 2, things were far worse. Just before the first explosion, there was a call, "Everyone off the ship." Some interpreted it as the lunch break and went for their jackets; this may have cost them their lives. Among the nine who survived No. 2, Sickavish and McLean had particularly narrow escapes. They had to crawl under a dangling load of lumber and across mixed cargo to the distant ladder. McLean was burned on hands and face as he reached the top of that ladder, the last to escape from No. 2. A union request for extra ladders received the support of shipbuilder William McLaren, as did a plea for better arrangement of the mast-house doors. The commission agreed.

Having eliminated the various theories put forth as causes of the fire, the commission decided that the

true cause was one which no one had suggested: "a lighted match carelessly dropped by a longshoreman" into spilled whisky.

in coming to this conclusion we have kept steadily before us the fact that there was no direct evidence that whisky had been spilled, and none that a lighted match had been dropped. But . . . we are irresistibly driven to that conclusion. There is no other rational explanation . . . There is no evidence that the spilling of the whisky was by broaching; yet we think . . . such was the case. While we appreciate that it is almost impossible to load a general cargo like this without some damage in the course of handling yet we think that the whisky barrels . . . were stowed in sound condition. They had not very far to go from the wharf . . . They would not be damaged in that short journey. If that is so, broaching was the cause of the spilling.

This reasoning overlooks a basic fact: cargo can be severely damaged even in a short journey. All it takes is for a winch driver to drop a fragile load a small distance instead of letting it down gently.

The commission's assumption that the whisky cargo had been broached was damaging to the longshoremen, because there was no possibility of broaching by anyone else. Indeed, many witnesses had seen the whisky stowed far back along the side of the ship and quickly closed in by other cargo. How could anyone have got at that whisky? ". . . We think there was a space giving access to the whisky barrels, and here a match was lit and through some unhappy chance was dropped. The ensuing fire must have caught quickly and spread rapidly."

To reach this view the commission had to conclude that there had been a passageway giving access to the whisky, that whisky had been broached and spilled, and that at least one man lit a match, dropped it, and ignited the fumes. This line of reasoning relied heavily on evidence that a jacket with hot water bottles sewn inside and lunch pails with soldered compartments for carrying liquids were later found in Nos. 2 and 3. "Those utensils were there for the express purpose of carrying away pilfered whisky. They could have no other purpose. They were direct evidence of preparation to this end, and no explanation was forthcoming."

Years later the commission's reasoning was confirmed. Early in 1980 a ninety-one-year-old longshoreman told Vancouver newsman Chuck Davis what he had learned from another longshoreman back in 1957 when both had been hospitalized. The other man, called Joe, did not expect to live, and told his friend that a narrow passage had indeed been cleared back to the liquor. One by one, the men took a drink or filled a bottle. Whisky was spilled. One man, already tipsy, couldn't see well and struck a match. Joe had



Thick smoke engulfs the ship shortly after the explosion.

kept his own counsel for twelve years. His friend guarded it for another twenty-three.

What then of the cadet who was under orders to watch No. 3 tween decks for pilferage and breakage, but saw none? "This young lad had never had the job before. He had no instructions to stop the longshoremen from smoking . . . he did not see the whisky at all." On these grounds the commission decided that fault lay not only with Montgomery, Galt, Wright, Bissett and Horsfield, but also with "one or more longshoremen working in No. 3 tween decks. [They] were guilty of wrongful acts and defaults which contributed to the casualty, and must be censured."

It is a fact well known to the commission and others familiar with stevedoring that liquor is broached by longshoremen, but everyone also knew that no longshoremen could steal a drop without the complicity of

other liquor lovers. Among these are foremen, supercargoes, superintendents, guards, ship's officers, customs officers, and even police officers. All know about the business of broaching, and most condone it because they benefit from it. It is a form of corruption that has gone on for a very long time, and in ports worldwide. It is regrettable that the commission did not, in fairness, draw on this knowledge of the actual situation to present a more balanced decision. If longshoremen were blameworthy for barrel-broaching on the *Green Hill Park*, so also were all who would welcome gifts of liquor from the men who had the most direct access to it. And since these practices were well-known, one must question by what reasoning other potentially volatile materials were stowed in the same hold as the whisky.

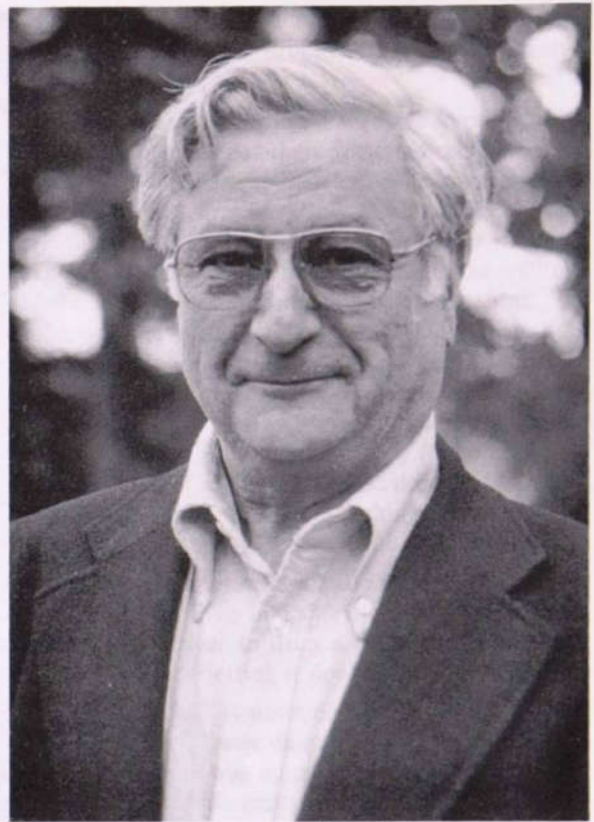
With commendable promptness, the commission

published its report on 12 May 1945, ten weeks after the event. Its findings have negative aspects other than those mentioned. One was excusing the government's failure to make Captain John Wright a party and thus subject to discipline. The commission said the failure "was no doubt due to the true facts of his position . . . only emerging during the course of his evidence . . . before us." This, however, was no justification at all for Wright not having been made a party. He could most certainly have been made a party at the secret stage of the enquiry, when awareness of his unacceptable behaviour and bizarre plans for the voyage would have destroyed any excuse for not making him a party. A reference by the commission to Wright's undisclosed "private anxieties" suggests that the Department wanted to be kind to him. If so, it clearly failed in its duty, for the commission thought Wright "unfit to be captain of a ship . . . Upon his own evidence [he] was gravely in default [and we] should have dealt severely with his certificate had he been made a party."

Another omission, for which not even a bad excuse was offered, lay in the Department's failure to name the Canada Shipping Company and Ernest Farquhar Riddle as parties, to say nothing of the CPR. It was inexcusable that a corporation whose three top officials, under Riddle, were found in serious dereliction of duty should escape scot-free after such loss of life, injury and damage to property. With power to impose fines, the commission could have penalized Canada Shipping and Riddle with sums large enough to make sure that others would take safety in shiploading very seriously.

Another negative aspect of the enquiry was that the tribunal, with extensive powers of punishment, chose only "censure", the lightest of all. Mere wrist-slapping was inadequate. In the same category was the commission's failure to condemn the ship's officers for their collective failure to provide effective watch over the whisky. It is all very well to blame longshoremen for breaching cargo, although the practice is notorious, but sending a youth of nineteen for a job requiring a mature man not interested in free liquor was just another example of managerial ineptitude.

What happened to the *Green Hill Park* after the explosions? Hardly had the echoes died away when many tugboats were on their way to her side, as was the city's fire department. The professional efficiency of the firemen and tugboatmen was a refreshing change from the bungling of Montgomery, Galt, Wright and the others. Fire engines poured water onto the ship from every available vantage point and rescued the men who had jumped or been blown overboard, including Herbert Mayhew, who was found in a safety net. They also assisted an officer whose clothing was on fire. The work went on despite the bursting flares,



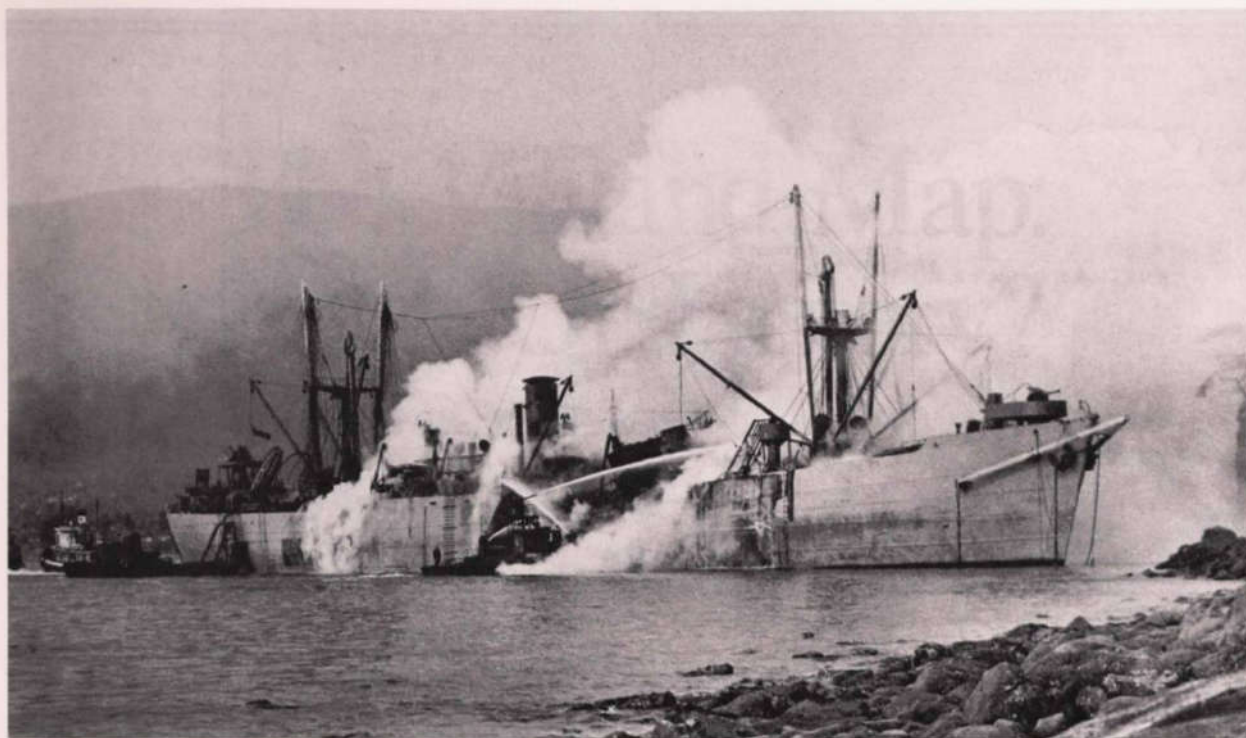
Lawyer John Stanton.

which, as one newspaper wrote, "continued to pour into the sky at intervals."

The small harbour tug *Charles H. Cates No. 5* was soon at the scene; her captain, Douglas Dixon, recalls his difficulty in towing a blazing barge of lumber away from the stricken vessel. Other tugs hauled a sister ship into the harbour to facilitate removal of the *Green Hill Park*. Still others acted as fireboats.

Hours earlier, nine shipyard workers had gone aboard the *Park* ship to check her engines. After the explosions they took refuge with crew members at the stern, the area least affected. There they assisted Dixon, now joined by the tugs *Kyuquot* and *RFM*, to fix towlines. At the same time the naval tug *Glendevon* arrived, despite warnings to stay away because more explosions were feared. The *Glendevon* came alongside several times to rescue men who were sliding down ropes. Once in safety, they were asked to volunteer to return aboard the *Green Hill Park* to help the tugs get her out of the harbour. First Officer Horsfield, Third Officer Stuart S. McKenzie, and crewman Clarence Wallace went back aboard, and from the stern of the ship did what they could. They reported the deck "unbearably hot" a scant twenty feet from their station.

With towlines in place, the difficult process began of towing the ship away, stern first. The tugboat men



The Green Hill Park on the rocks by Stanley Park, still burning.

did their job, never knowing if more explosions would occur, for cargoes in Nos. 2 and 3 still blazed fiercely. At first it was thought that the ship could be beached on mud flats across the harbour. On the way, however, she herself seemed to disdain the idea, turning a complete circle. The tugs were having a very awkward time as the ship kept yawing wildly. The bow was becoming ever lighter, and there was no way of steering from there because of the fire. Naval officers decided that she must be taken out into English Bay (the outer harbour) and scuttled. The *Green Hill Park* herself decided otherwise.

To reach English Bay the tugs had to haul their tow through the harbour entrance, First Narrows, where tidal currents are strong. Navigation here is made more tricky because a gravel bar called Calamity Point, projects from the North Shore into the main channel. As she passed this point, the vessel sheered, turned full circle, and beached herself on the gravel. The tugs managed to get her back into deep water and with their tow passed under the big suspension bridge (the Lion's Gate). Those looking down saw a spectacular sight. Soon afterwards a back-eddy drove the ship firmly onto the rocks of Stanley Park on the south shore. The tugs could do no more for the *Green Hill Park*, but Vancouver's fireboat, *J.H. Carlisle*, had now arrived and began pumping sea water into the fires. Captain Dixon later explained that pressure from the

nozzles kept pushing the fireboat away from the ship, so that he had to use his tug to keep them together.

Horsfield, McKenzie and Wallace were taken off by a police boat a couple of hours later, but even after many more hours of intense firefighting no one could get below to begin the task of locating and removing the bodies. That was done the next day. Later the ship was towed to a pier back in the harbour, and plans were made to salvage the boilers and engines and to put the hull up for sale as a breakwater.

Those plans were never carried out. Brazilian interests bought the ship from the government for less than nine per cent of cost and had it repaired. Renamed *Phaeax II* and flying the Panamanian flag of convenience, the ship sailed for twenty-three more years. In days of a worldwide shortage of merchant ships, Canadian taxpayers were deprived, by their government's generosity to a Brazilian company, of benefitting from a ship that had cost them dearly.

Some of the political realities involved in the public enquiry are clear. It was, for instance, a political decision of the Department of Transport to shelter Riddle and his company by failing to make them parties. Riddle was too powerful a figure in Canada's shipping world to be exposed to punishment or even censure for having hired incompetent people — Montgomery and Galt — to run his Vancouver operations, or to be asked embarrassing questions about the conflict of interest



arising from chartering the *Green Hill Park* to himself. He was also one of three representatives of private shipping interests who had already, in 1944, secretly recommended to the government that the fleet be sold, at low prices, to the private shipping industry after the war. That advice was followed. It was sold at a fraction of cost by the King and St. Laurent governments. After 1949 even the use of the Canadian flag was no longer required, and owners were free to sell to foreign companies or to use "flags of convenience".

As a ship is governed by the laws of the country whose flag she flies, the new ship owners take advantage of the low wages, low safety standards and low maintenance costs prevailing in third world countries. They could make more money than if their ships were subject to the laws of Canada with its higher standards. For example, Canadian Pacific has a "run-away fleet" of some twenty ships using the flag of Bermuda and depriving Canadian seamen of jobs and Canadian shipyards of work. Thus Canada, bounded by three oceans, having more than five hundred ports and the longest coastline of any country, and being dependent on foreign trade, placed herself at the mercy of foreign — mostly American — shipping lines. For the third time in our history the Canadian government had done away with a national fleet.

The choice of Justice Sidney Smith to head the enquiry had also been a political act. From the days of his maritime law practice, Smith had connections with D.S. Montgomery, a brother of the English Field Marshal, and John Valentine Clyne, who was to become a major tycoon. He was exactly the man to head this enquiry, not so much for his knowledge of ships, but

because he knew precisely what decisions and penalties would be acceptable to the establishment. I have already noted the praise he gave to Willoughby of the CPR, although that gentleman's failure to pass on vital information was a serious omission. A stiff fine rather than praise would have been more to the point. Yet Smith's political talents were such that he made his accolade of Willoughby (and by inference the CPR) seem just and fair.

When the case was over, I felt a sense of accomplishment mixed with disappointment. It was good to know that I had helped to expose poltroonery in exalted employer and official circles, even though some blame-worthy higher-ups went unscathed for political reasons. It was also good to know that celebrated members of the legal profession were not larger than life, as I had once imagined. However, I was disappointed that longshoremen were blamed for broaching liquor, with no attempt to place the finding within its actual context. This fed the prejudice against waterfront workers in those circles where longshoremen are seen as thieves, thugs, or worse. It is a cultivated prejudice that lingers, helping employers to drag out negotiations with the ILWU, and Parliament to enact laws taking away normal collective bargaining rights, as was done in 1972, 1975 and 1982. Nonetheless, the union's participation in the enquiry did help to increase public awareness of the dangerous realities of waterfront work.

*John Stanton, a pioneer Canadian labour lawyer, has been a member of the British Columbia bar since 1936. This article is from his forthcoming book on British Columbia labour unions, **They Never Said Die**, to be published by Steel Rail Publishing, Ottawa, later this year.*

The Vinland Map: Hoax Or History?

By Robert McGhee

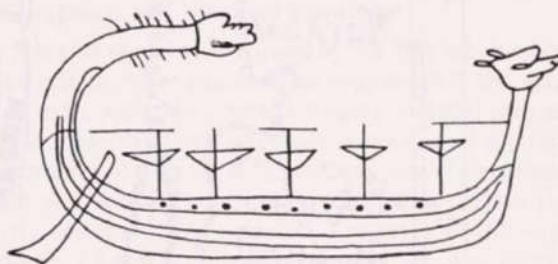
The library of Yale University holds, but rarely exhibits, a map which may be a key to better understanding early European exploration across the Atlantic. The map was supposedly drawn around A.D. 1440, 50 years before Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World, yet it shows a land that can be interpreted as the east coast of Canada from northern Baffin Island to the south coast of Newfoundland. If it is genuine, this is the earliest known representation of Canada on European maps. More importantly, it also suggests that knowledge of Canada had existed in Europe for the preceding 500 years, and probably influenced the European explorations into the western Atlantic which began in 1492. The story of the "Vinland Map", as it has come to be known, provides a fascinating insight into the processes of modern historical scholarship.

11 October 1965 was the eve of Columbus Day, the great Italian-American celebration of the Genoese navigator who "discovered" America. This was the day on which Yale University chose to announce that they were in possession of a map which was drawn half a century before Columbus' voyage, and which showed North America. Headlines in the *Chicago Tribune* called it "The Map that Spoiled Columbus Day".

The map had been given to Yale seven years earlier by an anonymous donor. This donor had purchased it, almost certainly at the instigation of the Yale Library, from an American bookdealer. He, in turn, had recently purchased it from a European dealer who claimed not to be at liberty to reveal the source from which it had been obtained.

Because of its scholarly importance, and its shadowy pedigree, the map was subjected to intense study. When purchased, it had been bound into a large manuscript

volume called *The Tartar Relation*, a record of an expedition sent by the Pope in 1245-47 to negotiate with and spy upon the Khan of the Mongols, the nephew of Genghis Khan and the major rival of the Pope for political control of Europe. Records of this expedition were well known from other sources, but *The Tartar Relation* added much new information. The map had apparently been drawn in order to illustrate the Relation, and its representation of the Old World was consistent with other known European maps of the period. It also shared with contemporaneous European



Norse ship, thirteenth century.

maps a penchant for placing islands in the Atlantic Ocean, islands such as Brasil and St. Brendan's Isle, which we now know to be non-existent. It differed from other maps, however, in including two large named islands in the western Atlantic.

The more northerly of these islands is labelled *Gro-nelada*, and is immediately recognizable as Greenland. This caused grave suspicions among the scholars who studied the map; although Greenland was known to European geographers of the period, it was never portrayed as an island, but as a peninsula descending from a large polar continent extending westward from



Danish Royal Library

Map based on the 1570 chart of Sigurður Stefánsson, identifying ancient place names by latitude markings.

northern Norway. This map not only showed Greenland as an island, but as an island with a general outline which closely resembles that which appears on modern maps.

The second configuration, lying to the south and west of Greenland, is another large island with a roughly semi-circular form, the western boundary very vague while the eastern coast is marked by two deep inlets. A label identifies this island as *Vinilanda Insula* (Island of Vinland). This caused the scholars even greater concern. Although Vinland, the land discovered by the mediaeval Greenlandic Norse around A.D. 1000, was generally considered to be eastern North America, and although its name appears in European geographies dating from the eleventh century and later, it had never appeared on a map dating from the period before Columbus' voyages.

Knowing that the map might represent a major advance in knowledge of mediaeval European geography, but also that they would be judged extremely gullible if the map proved to be a forgery, the Yale scholars set to work to authenticate their find. To begin, they satisfied themselves that the *Tartar Relation* manuscript was a genuine document dating from the early fifteenth century. This was fairly easily accomplished, and its authenticity has not been doubted by most critics. Next, they compared the Old World portions of the Vinland Map with other known maps of the period, and were satisfied that it fit neatly into the period from which it was purported to come; the only unexpected elements were the Greenland and Vinland configurations and their accompanying notes.

They analyzed the handwriting of both the *Tartar Relation* and the Vinland Map, which appeared to be in the same hand and in a style which was characteristic of the Upper Rhineland during the early fifteenth century. Next, they checked the watermarks of the paper on which the Relation was written; the paper came from a small paper-mill in southern Germany or Switzerland, and also dated to the early fifteenth century. The map itself, however, was drawn on parchment and therefore could not be so easily dated.

There was one simple means, however, of checking whether the questionable map and the apparently genuine Relation belonged together. Both documents contained a few holes made by book worms which, at some point in its history, had tunneled through the volume. Unfortunately, the worm holes in the map did not align with the worm holes in the Relation manuscript, suggesting that the two documents had only recently been bound together, and throwing further doubt on the authenticity of the map. Then something very curious happened. It had been 1957 when Yale had first been approached by the American bookdealer who owned the volume containing the Vinland Map and *Tartar Relation*. In 1958, one of the Yale scholars

who had shown polite interest in the volume, happened to look through an English bookdealer's catalogue. He saw a copy of a fairly common late-mediaeval manuscript, the *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent de Beauvais, selling for a low price, and ordered it by mail for his own collection. When it arrived, he lent it to the American dealer who had originally approached him. That evening, the scholar received a telephone call from the dealer, who had compared the Beauvais manuscript with the *Tartar Relation*: the handwriting was the same, the paper was the same, and when the Beauvais volume was placed between the Map and the Relation, the worm holes all aligned! It seemed that all three manuscripts had originally been bound together for a long time, and only relatively recently had they been separated. The supposition was that both volumes came onto the market at about the same time from the same private library, where they had become separated at some time over the past century when the original bindings had worn out and new ones had been added to the Map and Relation. The original bindings remained with the Beauvais manuscript, and were in a style which was consistent with the handwriting and the paper of the Relation: southern Germany in the fifteenth century. Thus, after an apparently amazing coincidence and several years of study, the Yale scholars finally concluded that the Vinland Map was a genuine fifteenth century map of the world which showed a portion of North America. They even suggested that it may have been drawn at the Council of Basle (1431-49), an important church event which attracted scholars from throughout Europe, and could have served as a centre for the exchange of geographical and historical knowledge.

Not everyone was convinced by the Yale scholarship. The critics, who continued to suggest that the map was most probably a recent forgery inserted into an old manuscript, were especially suspicious of the representation of Greenland. The true outline of Greenland was not known to European scholarship before the early decades of the twentieth century, and this supposedly fifteenth century representation was simply too accurate. Others found apparent problems in the Latin used in written legends on the map, as well as in the *Tartar Relation*. Scientists at the British Museum briefly examined the map in 1967 and, although their results were not conclusive, suggested that there were signs that the parchment on which the map was drawn may have been chemically treated, perhaps in order to remove an older document and substitute a recently-drawn map. The Vinland Map hung in a sort of scholarly limbo for a decade, never becoming sufficiently accepted that it could be used as a convincing argument that Europe had geographical knowledge of North America half a century before the voyages of Columbus.



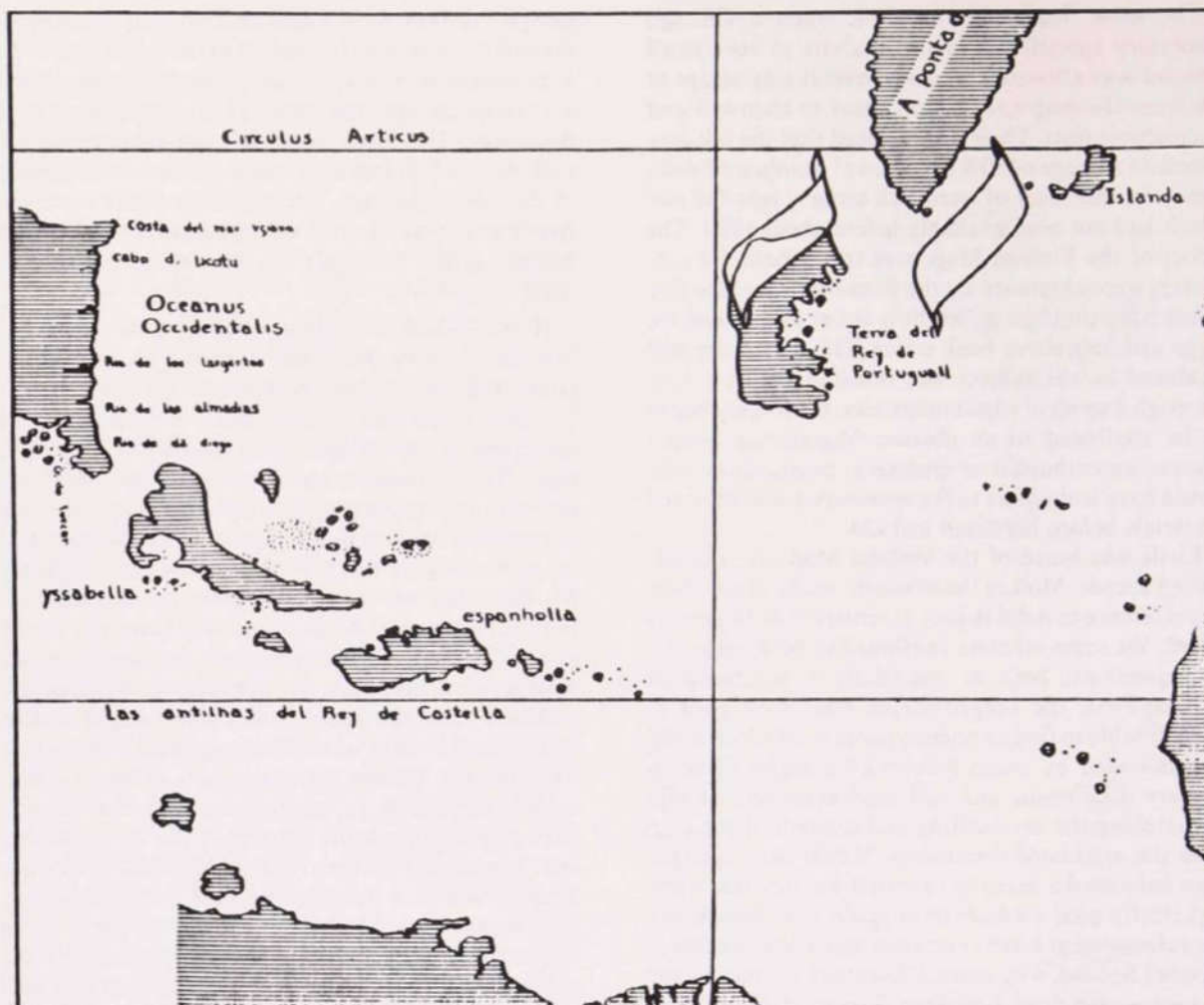
The blow finally fell in 1974, when a Chicago laboratory specializing in the analysis of very small samples was allowed to remove several tiny scraps of ink from the map and subject them to chemical and microscopic tests. Their tests showed that the ink contained an average of 30% of a form of titanium dioxide, a major constituent of twentieth century inks but one which had not been available before about 1920. The critics of the Vinland Map were triumphant, its supporters were chastened by the demonstration that fine scholarship could be gulled by a clever forger, and the large and impressive book which Yale University had produced on the subject was remaindered at a loss. Through a series of vague inferences, the forgery began to be attributed to an obscure Yugoslavian church scholar, an enthusiast of mediaeval missionaries, who would have had access to the necessary knowledge and materials before his death in 1924.

Little was heard of the Vinland Map over the following decade. Most of the scholarly works which made any reference to it did so only to remark it as an obvious fraud. Yet some scholars continued to be troubled by two questions, both of essentially a psychological nature. First, the alleged forger must have gone to great trouble to find an ancient parchment which could be associated by worm holes with genuine fifteenth century documents, and had been extremely careful in matching the handwriting and contents of the map with the associated documents. Would such a forger then have used a patently twentieth century ink, when a perfectly good mediaeval ink could have been easily manufactured at home from such ingredients as acorns or soot? Second, why would a twentieth century forger of such a map draw a modern likeness of Greenland? Surely this would be a certain give-away, and any competent forger would represent Greenland either as a vague blob in the northwestern Atlantic, or as a peninsula depending from a polar continent, as it was represented on other fifteenth century maps.

In early 1986 the fortunes of the Vinland Map changed once again. Physicists at the University of California at Davis had developed non-destructive techniques for studying the chemical characteristics of ancient documents. Sub-atomic particles, accelerated to immense speeds in a cyclotron, were aimed at a document in their path, and the resulting scatter of X-rays measured in order to determine the number and amounts of chemicals in ancient paper and ink. They had already tested the Dead Sea Scrolls and other documents, and were confident that their techniques gave accurate readings. This was a technique which was much more sophisticated than the earlier Chicago tests on the ink of the Vinland Map. The only tests then available had required the destruction of the

sample, so they were based on only tiny samples of ink and the results extrapolated to the entire map. The accelerator tests were non-destructive, gave more accurate readings, and could be applied to the entire document. The Davis physicists announced that not only did they detect only trace amounts of titanium in the ink of the map, but that both the ink and the parchment were entirely characteristic of a fifteenth century origin. Suddenly the Vinland Map was once more respectable.

If the Vinland Map does not prove to be a genuine fifteenth century document, how can we explain its Greenland and Vinland configurations? The manner in which Greenland is represented is perhaps not as surprising as was thought when the map first came to light. The Greenland configuration is not nearly as accurate as it appears at first sight; the island is much too small in relation to the remainder of the map, and its north coast is much further south than it should be. The coast has many apparently random indentations, which cannot be matched with known bays and fiords. The only two features which obviously coincide with modern maps are the convergent shape of the southern tip of the island, and a long straight section of the northwestern coast which appears to represent Melville Bay. During the early years of Norse settlement in Greenland, the climate was somewhat warmer than at present and the amount of sea ice somewhat less. The standard sailing route from Iceland took ships directly west to a point on the East Greenland coast, then south to round Cape Farewell and north along the west coast to the settlements; approximately the southern quarter of the east coast was therefore well known. Archaeological finds testify to the fact that Norse hunting expeditions penetrated as far north as the present Upernavik District, well over half-way up the western coast of the island and at the southern edge of Melville Bay. In the 1960s, when the map was first studied, it was generally thought that the Greenlandic Norse had had few if any contacts with the Eskimos who arrived in Greenland at about the same time, and that such contacts would have been limited to hostilities. It has since become apparent that the relationships between the two groups must have been considerably more complex, and existed over a period of several centuries. Finds of Norse material in Eskimo villages in far northwestern Greenland and adjacent Ellesmere Island indicate that the Norse were in some form of contact with the Eskimos as early as the twelfth century. The remains of an Eskimo umiak, a large skin-covered boat, has been found on the north coast of Greenland, an area of almost permanent sea-ice under present conditions. Radiocarbon dates indicate that this boat voyage was made during the time of the Norse settlements, and indeed parts of the wooden frame of the boat were of oak, almost certainly derived



Map based on the Cantino chart of c. 1502, representing Newfoundland as "Terra del Rey du Portugal".

from the Norse. The Eskimos circled Greenland and were in a position to assure the Norse that it was an island. This is essentially all that the Vinland map shows: that Greenland is an island with a convergent southern tip and a straight northwestern coast, where the inland ice-cap abuts directly and very impressively on the iceberg-strewn waters of Melville Bay.

If the Greenland configuration can be explained, what of the Vinland configuration, and what does the map tell us of mediaeval European knowledge of Canada? First, it tells us very little that we didn't already know from the Icelandic sagas and other sources regarding Greenlandic Norse explorations of the New World. The two map labels referring to Vinland are somewhat at variance with other sources. The shorter one says simply "Island of Vinland, discovered by Bjarni and Leif in company." This appears to be a conflation of two accounts in the Greenlanders' Saga, which states that the new lands were first sighted by

Bjarni Herjulfsson (about A.D. 986) and later explored by Leif Eiriksson (about A.D. 1000). The longer text repeats the story of Bjarni and Leif, describes Vinland as a fertile country, and states that Bishop Henricus (Eirik) travelled there in A.D. 1117, stayed there for some time in both summer and winter, and then returned to Greenland and Europe. The Icelandic Annals report that in the year A.D. 1121 Bishop Eirik Gnipsson voyaged in search of Vinland, but says nothing about his finding it. The two accounts disagree regarding the year of the bishop's explorations, and whether or not he actually found Vinland and spent time there, yet the one account seems as likely as the other, and there is little to choose between them.

It seems generally agreed that the Vinland configuration on the map does not derive from actual Norse charts. Rather, it probably derives from the same sort of oral traditions which we know from the sagas, and which the mapmaker interpreted as best he could on

parchment. For example, the sagas refer to three New World "lands" ranging from north to south: Helluland, Markland and Vinland. The two major inlets on the east coast of the map's Vinland configuration, dividing the coast into three sections, may simply be an arbitrary interpretation of this reference. Yet a comparison of the latitudes of these three sections of the Vinland configuration with those of Greenland and Europe, as they are shown on the Vinland Map, suggests the possibility that the mapmaker may have had more precise knowledge than that which we can obtain from study of the surviving Icelandic accounts and traditions. Before making such a comparison, two facts should be noted. First, the Vinland configuration on the map is almost as distant from Greenland as Greenland is from Europe, indicating that we are not dealing with an accurate navigational chart of the northwestern Atlantic; we should remember, however, that in Norse times and until well after the fifteenth century, longitudes could be only vaguely estimated by sailing times and speeds, while latitudes could be easily determined and compared by the altitude of the noon sun or the Pole Star. Secondly, the label *Vinilanda Insula* is placed adjacent to the northern tip of the configuration, and appears to refer to the entire large island.

The most northerly of the three sections of *Vinilanda Insula* lies between roughly the same latitudes as the west coast of Greenland from Melville Bay to just north of the southern tip; these latitudes correspond well with those of Baffin Island, which was probably the barren and mountainous Helluland (flat stone land) of the Icelandic sagas. It is separated from the section to the south by a long and narrow channel ending in a large lake; the latitude of this channel is just north of the southern tip of Greenland, at approximately the same latitude as Hudson Strait. The next section spans the distance from about the southern tip of Greenland, south to about the latitude of the south coast of Ireland; this approximates the latitudes of Labrador, which is probably the Markland (forest land) of the sagas. This area is separated from that to the south by a deep indentation running southwesterly into the land mass, setting off a long peninsular piece of land reminiscent of the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland; the latitude of the northern tip is approximately equal to that of the south coast of Ireland, the southern coast equal to the northern Bay of Biscay; these are approximately the latitudes of the northern tip and southern coast of Newfoundland. The peninsular configuration is reminiscent of that on the Sigurder Stefansson map, a late sixteenth century Icelandic chart which labels a similar configuration the *Promontorium Winlandiae*, and which has been used as evidence to assign a Newfoundland location to the Vinland of the sagas.

If the map is genuine, and if the latitude of the

Vinland configuration are actually the product of more than mere guesswork on the part of the mapmaker, the latitudes of the three sections of coast tend to confirm current identifications of the three "lands" mentioned in the sagas: Helluland with Baffin Island, Markland with Labrador, and Vinland with Newfoundland, the location of the probable mediaeval Norse occupation site at L'Anse au Meadows. It is perhaps worth mentioning that these identifications were not current in the 1920s, when the suspected forgery of the Vinland Map occurred; at that time, Vinland was generally considered to refer to a region south of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, probably on the Atlantic coast of the United States.

If we assume that the Vinland configuration on the map is actually a graphical representation of the east coast of Canada surviving from Greenlandic Norse tradition, does it suggest that knowledge of Canada was current in Europe at the time of the transatlantic explorations of the late fifteenth century? As has been pointed out by sceptics, the Vinland Map is unique, and was outside the general European cartographical traditions of the fifteenth century. As far as is known, its Greenland and Vinland configurations were not copied by any other mapmakers prior to the age of exploration, which has been taken as evidence that it could not have contributed to European knowledge of the period.

However, something resembling the Vinland configuration does appear on several southern European maps dating from the first years of the 1500s. These maps (the Cantino chart of 1502, the Canerio chart which was also probably drawn in 1502, and the King chart of 1500-1503) were produced following the explorations of Cabot (1497) and Cortereal (1501). Each shows a semicircular island with a vague western coast and deeply indented eastern coast, lying to the southwest of Greenland. This configuration is variously titled *Terra cortereal* or *Terra del Rey du Portugal* (the land of the King of Portugal), and represents Newfoundland and the adjacent coast of Labrador, which were explored by the Portuguese sailor Manuel Cortereal. This is the same portion of North America which was explored 500 years earlier by the Greenlandic Norse, and almost certainly the area which they knew as Vinland. The island which the Portuguese placed on their maps illustrating these discoveries is very like the Vinland configuration on the Vinland Map, supposedly drawn 80 years previously. This suggests that southern European cartographers may indeed have been familiar with this mapmaking tradition, and that they correctly identified the newly-found *Terra del Rey du Portugal* with the ancient *Vinilanda Insula*.

Did Christopher Columbus know about Vinland when he set out across the Atlantic? Some scholars

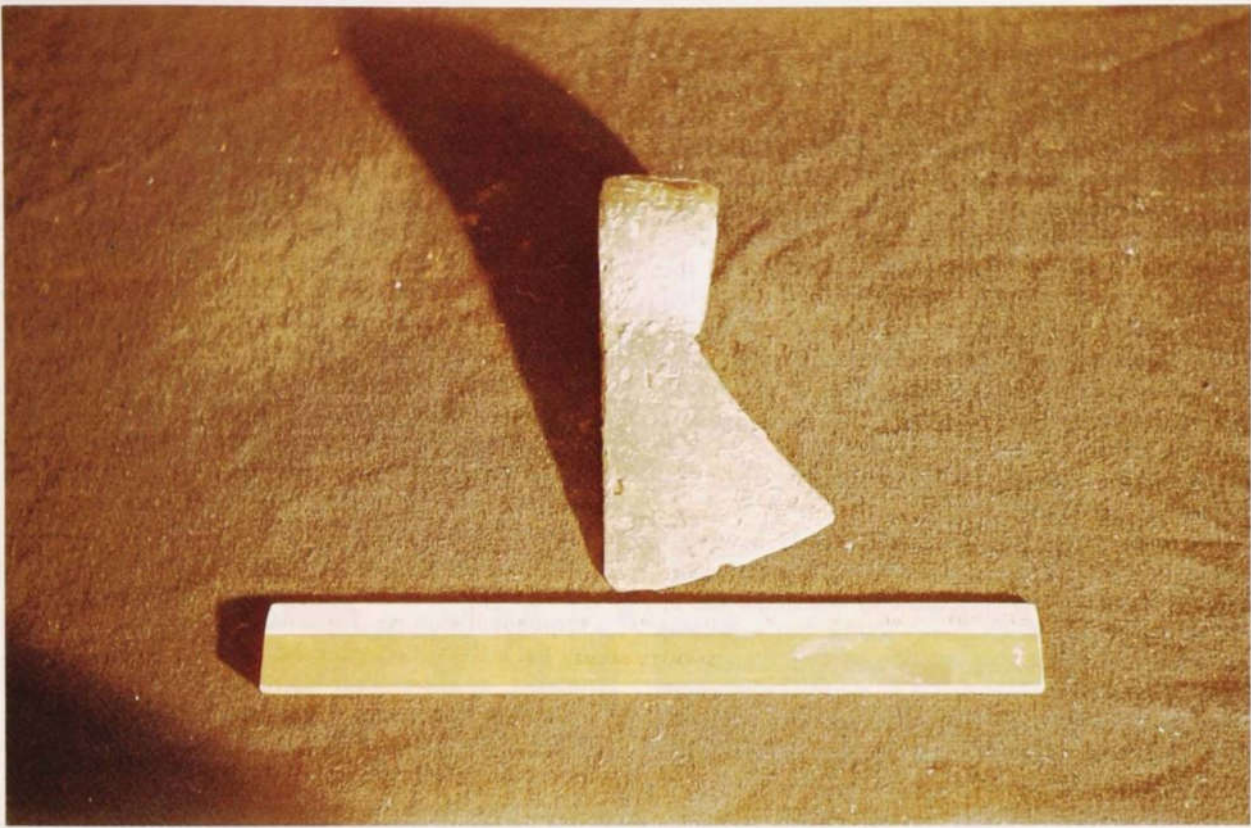


Columbus takes leave of Ferdinand and Isabella. Hoping to bypass Canada?

have proposed, on the basis of very shaky evidence, that Columbus had made a previous visit to Iceland where he may have learned of the land in the west discovered some 500 years earlier. If the Vinland map is genuine, and if its knowledge had some currency in southern Europe during the late fifteenth century, Columbus might have learned of it much closer to home. There is one piece of evidence which strongly suggests that, however he came by the knowledge, he did know of the eastern coast of Canada. Fifteenth century explorers knew, as well as do the navigators of modern polar flights from Europe to North America, that the shortest way from east to west is in the higher latitudes. Why, then, did Columbus choose to sail straight west from Spain, rather than work his way north along the European coast to perhaps Ireland, and then make a relatively short passage westward to the Orient?

The most likely answer is that Columbus knew what he would find if he followed such a course: a rock-bound coast guarding a land of spruce forests, with perhaps some grazing land and maybe even some wild grapes. No spices, no gold, no slaves, nor any of the other magical attractions of the Orient could be expected on this route. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to conclude that Columbus deliberately bypassed Canada. That he did so, in turn suggests that the knowledge embodied in the Vinland Map may have been common in the seaports of Europe during the fifteenth century, a poorly-documented legacy of the first Europeans to explore the western Atlantic half a millennium before.

Robert McGhee is an archaeologist with the Archaeological Survey of Canada, Ottawa.



TIMBER!

*An Adventurer's life on the Bay
was an endless search for wood*

BY TIM BALL

45 / April-May 1987

Recently the world has seen the effects that fluctuations in the availability of oil can have upon the economies of the world. We have also seen the shift from heating oil to natural gas as the difference in price made the change economical, just as there was a shift from coal to oil in the 1940s and 1950s. Both events have served to underline the dependence that the twentieth century has upon oil as a resource, but this is just another transition in the longterm pattern of dependence upon an essential energy source. Oil was in use prior to coal, but usually only animal or vegetable oils and in very small quantities. One example is the Beluga whale oil that lit the lamps of the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company as they huddled over the meticulously kept journals that are the source of so much information about the pattern of their lives.

Oil replaced coal as the major fuel of industrial society just as coal had replaced wood. The major difference was that coal replaced only one major use of wood, its function as an energy source, but wood had far wider and, in some ways, more important uses. We tend to forget the importance of wood to the world prior to the nineteenth century. It was the source of heat for houses, although in the warmer climate of the Middle Ages this was not such an important factor as we would think. It was the building material for housing, including many that are primarily stone; all land and sea transport was made of wood and most machinery, including ploughs, was carved from the enormous variety of hardwoods available in Europe. True, the plough had a thin cutting edge of iron but even this was a product of the charcoal produced in such early energy centres as the Forest of Dean in England.

The hearts of oak that formed the navies of colonialism created a need for wood, that when combined with the need for more fuel to offset the cooler climates of the Little Ice Age, resulted in a massive assault on the forests of Europe. The demand was so great that in the reign of Louis XIV forests were being cut down all over France, but they still lacked the material necessary for masts. The British had access to the Baltic forests for their masts, but eventually this became endangered and they turned to the New World for supplies. There is little doubt that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries experienced a major energy crisis that was in many ways worse than that of the 1970s because wood was the basis of so much in their lives and economies. The importance of wood was even more acute for employees of the Hudson's Bay Company because they had moved into a climate that made its heat essential to survival, although it continued to fill so many other needs. They were confronted with this reality from the moment that they arrived at Churchill in the fall of 1717.

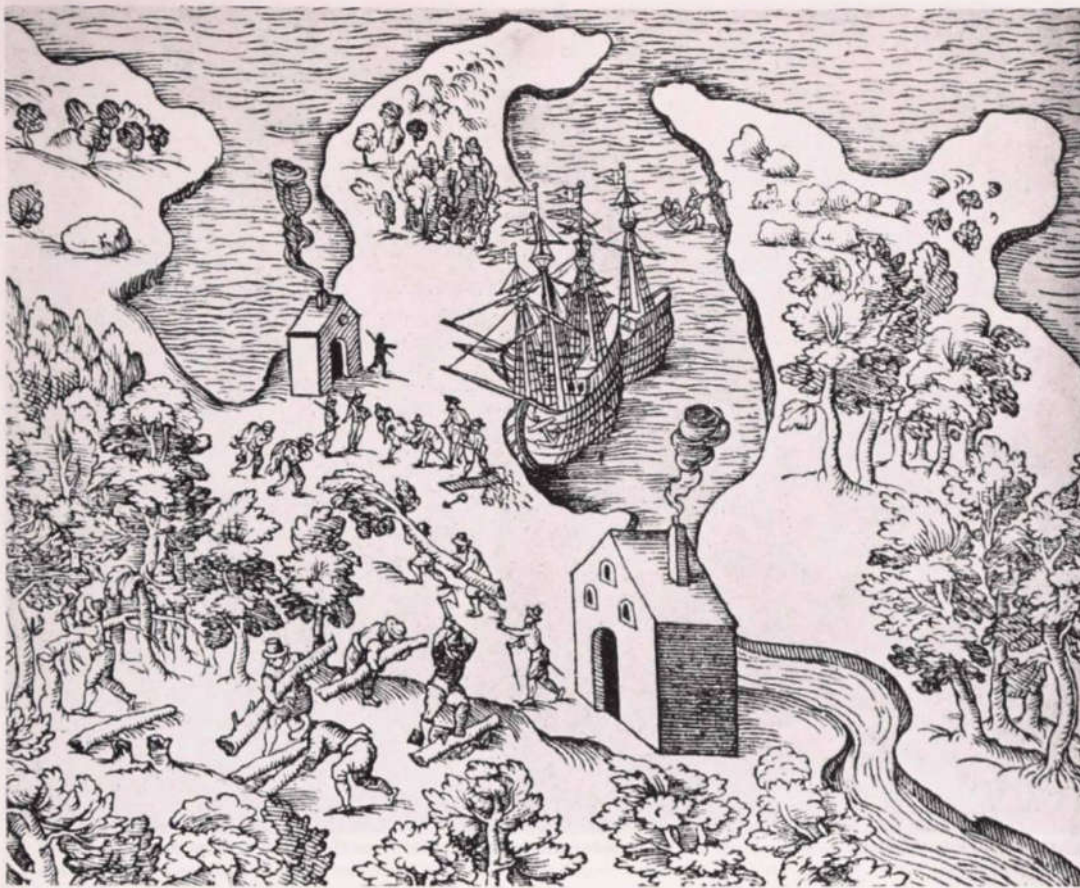
The climatic conditions along the Bay are harsh at

the best of times, which includes the present warm period of Earth's climatic history. In the latter part of the seventeenth and for most of the eighteenth century most areas were considerably cooler as the world slid through the period that is now known as the Little Ice Age. This is generally accepted as spanning from approximately 1450 to 1850, although it seems to have varied in length in different regions of the world. The nadir of the cold temperatures occurred in the decade from 1690 to 1700, which is interesting to contemplate as they relate to the early history of the Hudson's Bay Company. The cold temperatures had in some years reached quite dramatic levels even before the 1690s. The year 1683 is known as the year of the ice and was the subject of a superb painting by Jan Griffier the Elder of the frost fair on the Thames River which had a record two feet of ice in that bitter year. Frost was reported to a depth of four feet in Somerset, a county in the relatively mild southwest of England, and frequent reports of starvation and hardship occurred throughout Europe. The winter of 1683-4 is recorded by the late Prof. Gordon Manley, the English climatologist, as the coldest winter in the 350 year long record of thermometer readings. Sea ice in rafts as much as 5 km wide occurred along the channel coasts of southeast England and the opposite shore in France.

It is interesting to ask the question that is never posed, possibly because it seems so obvious: why did the fur trade occur? Radisson and Des Groseilliers had travelled to the interior of the continent and had brought furs to the settlement at Quebec but had no success in convincing the French authorities that the heavy tax on furs was unjust. They had more success by 1660 when they had lured successive expeditions of New Englanders into the Bay but with little result and by 1665 they were visiting London. The success of the 1668 voyage of the *Nonsuch* resulted in King Charles II granting to the Adventurers a charter in 1670. Not much happened even after the charter was granted and HBC records indicate, significantly, that no dividends were paid to the original stockholders until 1684, a year after the severe winter of 1683. The influences of climate on the origins of the fur trade need further elaboration.

The majority of the employees of the Company at Churchill during the eighteenth century spent most of their time searching for, cutting, hauling, and processing wood for a wide variety of uses, but primarily to offset, in some small way, the harshness of that environment. The demand that this made on the forests of the region are manifest today in a variety of ways.

The isthmus of land that leads out to the site of Fort Prince of Wales was once covered with trees, willow brush and much more soil than at present. Other areas are equally devoid of trees apparently cut down by the



Above: Jens Munck's wintering at Hudson Bay, 1619-20. The illustration on page 45 shows a typical eighteenth century axehead.

demands of the Company employees as the years passed. Where the soil was eroded, because of the protection provided by the trees and the binding properties of their roots, the trees could not regrow. In other places they have not regrown because of the exposure to the dessicating winds of the subarctic or, if they have been able to establish themselves, they remain relatively small because of the slow rate of growth.

Other evidence is found in the fact that scientific studies of the tree rings of the area have shown that in the vicinity of present day Churchill no large trees are older than 235 years. This means that these trees were too small to be cut by the Company in 1750 or thereabouts and have taken the intervening years to grow to measurable proportions. The extent of the cutting is documented in the daily journals of the Company and is exemplified by the report by Captain Coats, in his *Geography of Hudson's Bay* published in the nineteenth century, that wood had been cleared from the banks of the river for eighty miles.

The earliest known map of any portion of the province of Manitoba is that drawn as a result of the ill-fated winter spent by Jens Munck, a Danish explorer, in the estuary of the Churchill River in 1619-20. This

map shows that trees were extensive on the west side of the river and that one of the three major activities of Munck and his men was the cutting of those trees. He appears to have wintered in a location very close to that chosen by James Knight for the first Churchill Factory when he established the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company in the region 100 years later in the late summer of 1717.

The weather was blustery and cool and underlined the fact that shelter was necessary for the impending winter in this location that was as bleak as any that Company employees had been asked to endure. Munck's map shows a very elaborate building that was probably much different from the reality, although it did have to accommodate 66 men. Unfortunately there is no picture of the structure that Knight constructed, although it could not have been very substantial. The daily journals show that by December of 1717, 104 trees had been cut down and sawn into sufficient board feet to provide the necessary building materials. A further 800 trees were cut to build a stockade or defensive wall. This part of the structure is variously called a palisade or stockade (both are spelled in a variety of ways in the journals) and was formed by cutting



Carman Collection, British Museum

The Little Ice Age. Jan Griffier the Elder painted a frost fair on the Thames in the year 1683. That year the ice on the river was two feet thick.

and trimming straight trunks and burying them abutting each other to form a solid wall. Clearly this was a temporary structure because the following year 700 trees were cut to allow considerable expansion of the building. The sense of insecurity of that first winter is reflected in the fact that only 112 trees were cut to expand the palisade, thus suggesting that little expansion was needed compared to the quarters. A later palisade was to serve a defensive role but of a very different nature. An entry for 5 June 1724 states, "Our men a putting Up Some Pallasadoes to Keep the Indians from Our Garden Ground."

A second major need that first winter was for heat to help combat the bitter cold and biting winds of the subarctic climate. From the time of arrival up to the end of December, 23 days were spent specifically cutting firewood. This does not seem like many, but it was only one of numerous essential tasks that had to be performed, besides, it does not include all the time spent gathering deadfalls and other already available firewood. It is possible to be this precise because very clear distinction was made in the journal entries between "timber" which refers to wood that was to be used for some form of construction, and firewood, which is self-explanatory. In a similar careful manner the

various techniques for cutting, hauling and processing the wood are all clearly delineated and allow for a fascinating insight into the struggle with the environment that confronted these Europeans.

The treeline, or at least the transition from boreal forest to tundra, is a rather narrow zone as it runs from the Churchill region west to Great Slave Lake and then north to the Arctic coast. A study by the author, using the treeline or woods edge depicted on the map drawn by Samuel Hearne of his voyages to the Arctic coast, indicates that the vegetation has advanced a considerable distance northward in the warmer climatic conditions that have existed since the eighteenth century. As you move north through the forest the trees become progressively smaller and shorter although this is not a reflection of their age but rather an adaptation to the cold. Cross sections of the trees show that the rings are very close together, indicating that the rate of growth is very slow, thus even if a replacement programme had been introduced by the Company the trees would only now be reaching a useable dimension. Apart from their size, the trees are also fairly well spaced although there is a tendency to greater concentrations in some areas than others. This is primarily a function of the soils and the ability



The boreal forest south of Churchill near Thompson, Manitoba, where it takes trees approximately 90-100 years to grow to a six inch (15cm) diameter. To the east of Churchill trees occur in small clumps (below) large enough to trap snow and avoid the harsh winds.





South and east of Churchill in areas where there is shelter, soil and water the trees grow larger. This would have been the type of stand suitable for construction. This group was too small for use at the time of the construction of Fort Prince of Wales.

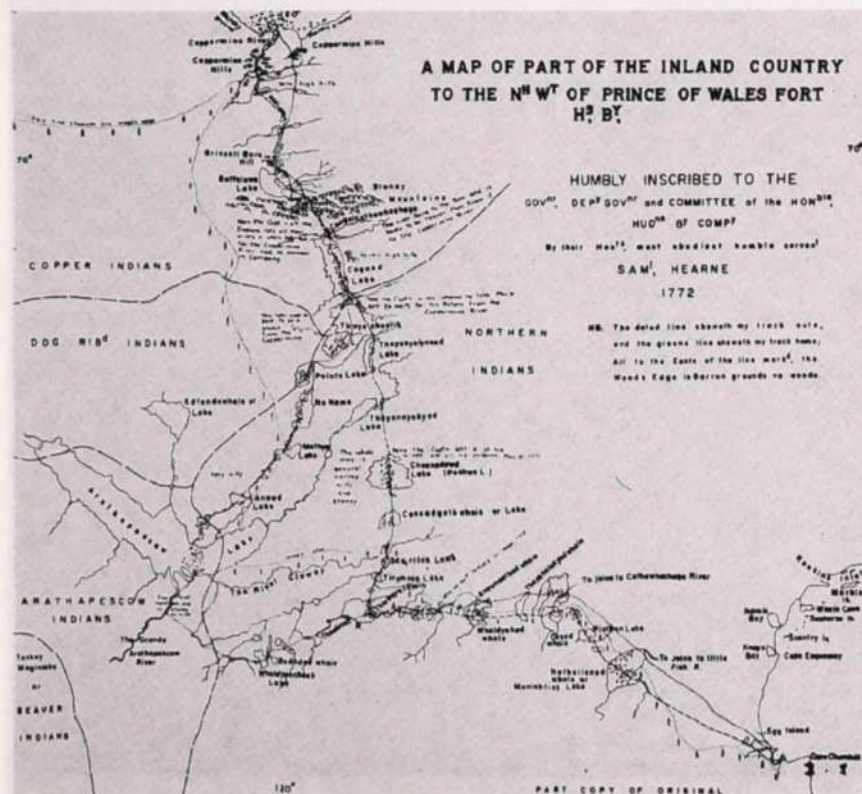
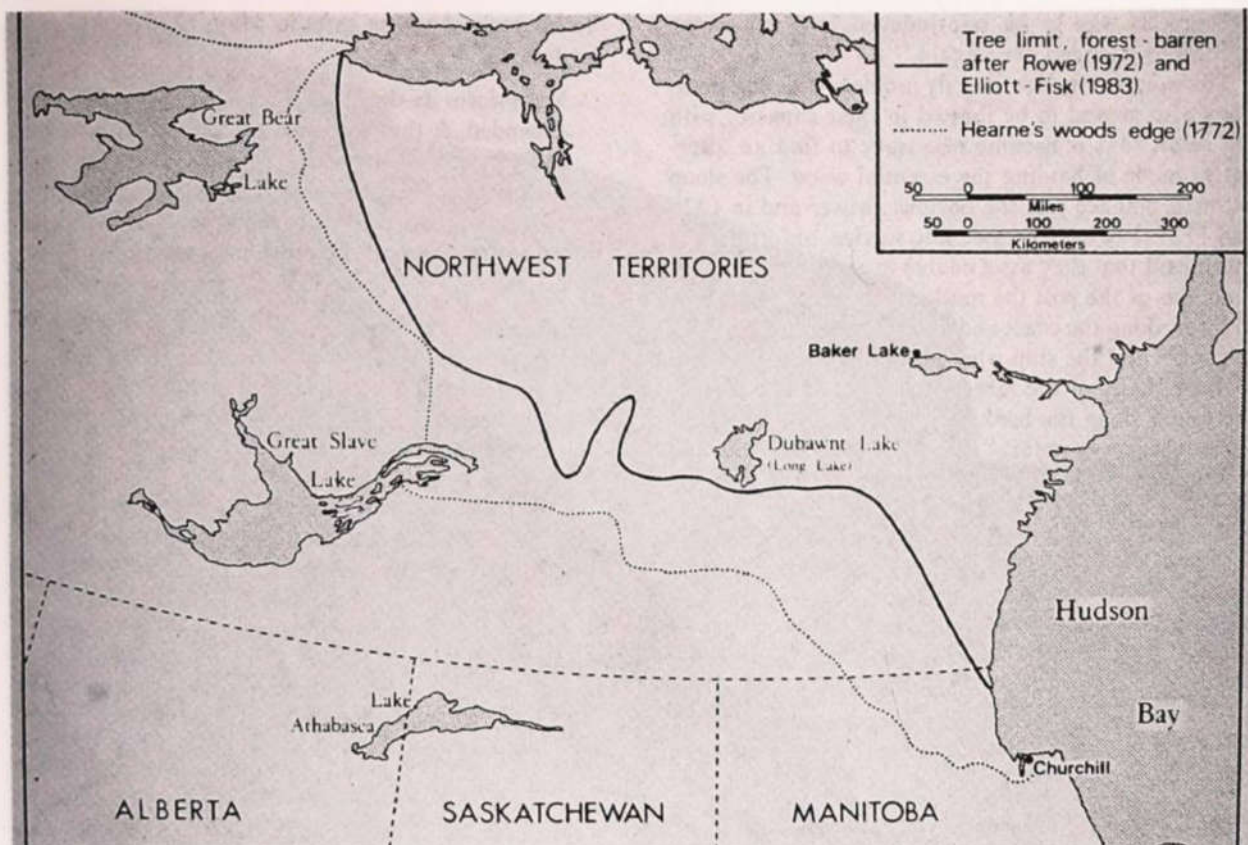
of the clump of trees to trap and retain snow in the winter, thus providing protection from the dessicating winds of this arid region. The pattern of distribution of trees was an important factor in determining the *modus operandi* of the woodcutting activities.

Timber was cut from any tree of sufficient dimension to provide the wood for the project at hand. An entry in the daily journal for 3 November 1731, notes "I sent for 5 pieces of Timber about 2 Miles from ye factory wch they felled and hauled 3 of them home on ye Great Sled". The proximity of these trees of adequate dimensions for timber so close to the factory suggests that they were left standing until needed. Just a year later, in June of 1732, heavy dimension timber was needed for beams and had to be brought from 30 miles up the river.

During this first preparation for winter at the new Company post, Knight, a veteran of subarctic winters knew that speed was paramount and therefore all the wood needed for timber and firewood was cut and hauled from the area immediately around the factory. Wood cut or gathered was hauled on the men's shoulders if it was close, or on a sled hauled by the men if it was further away. The greatest distance involved

was 2 miles but even this was arduous when there was insufficient snow. For the sake of expediency four rafts of wood were prepared and floated down the river, a practice that was not to be employed until ten years later in 1728 despite its apparent efficiency. After the firewood close to the factory had been expended the distances increased and the hauling became more arduous so that it became necessary to find a new method.

The solution was found by turning to local tradition and using dogs to haul the sleds over the increasing distances. It was a very successful operation for about four years between 1724 and 1728 but problems developed in the form of wolf attacks on the dogs, particularly when they were in heat. The attacks had begun before the dog sled was the major form of transport. In fact the first reference to an attack occurs on 25 November 1723. "Our men went 3 Turns for firewood & one of our Doggs going with them a Cross the Marsh mett with a Wolf, wch devored him within half a Mile of the factory." On 3 December the journal records that the offending wolf was caught although its ultimate fate is not recorded. In 1728 the dog sled as a major form of transportation was abandoned,



Above: The author's transposition of Hearne's treeline onto a modern map in conjunction with the present position of the treeline. It shows how the trees have spread north in the warmer climatic conditions since 1772. Below: Richard Ruggles' adaptation of Samuel Hearne's map on which the "tree's edge" is clearly shown with a dotted line and small fir trees.

although it was to be reintroduced later when the operations changed once again.

The wolves were not the only problem with dog sleds. They also proved to be limited in their capacity with the result that it became necessary to find an alternative mode of hauling the essential wood. The sloop or small pinnace was the obvious answer and in 1726 and 1727 they were pressed into service, unfortunately this meant that they were unable to carry out the other functions of the post the most important of which was to trade along the coast and to ferry materials between the shore and the ship when it arrived from England.

Since many of the larger trees and stands of trees are found along the banks of the rivers in this part of the world it was natural that the river would become the pathway for seeking and bringing wood to the post. Although rafts were used briefly in the first year or two their use was not continued, apparently because it was not an approved practice within the general pattern acceptable to the Governors. Historian Jennifer Brown suggests that this is a reflection of the manner of operation of the Company which preferred that employees only perform activities that were within normal practices. This position is supported by the fact that Richard Norton, Chief Factor, received a response

to his request to use rafts in May, 1725 which reads as follows:

You inform us that the Wood near ye Factory is all expended, & that you must for the future be obliged to Raft your Winters fire Wood, which you will be the better enabled to do, by having your complement of Men all the Year with you to assist in supplying yourselves with what you want . . .

Rafting proved to be enormously successful and became the most used method of bringing the increasing quantities of wood to the expanding post. The reference to a full "complement of Men" is very significant because this was the period when preparations for the construction of Fort Prince of Wales were underway. From 1725 onward the men spent almost double the number of days cutting firewood that they had in previous years as they struggled to build a stockpile that would free them for working on the fort. In 1725 they spent a full 83 days of the season cutting firewood but in the period from 1733 to 1737 they spent only 16, 11, 11, 33 and 27 days respectively at the same task. For the same period the men spent 59, 51, 84, 54, and 95 days respectively squaring timbers and cutting them into suitable dimensions for scaf-

An aerial view of the fort looking northeast. There are no trees in the area.





The outer wall of the fort showing the dressed stone that covered the rubble and inner bastions. The amount of mortar required to construct these walls was demanding on the local trees.

folding and other construction materials. By 1740 more men had arrived for the construction and thus released men to help rebuild the dwindling piles of firewood put under additional stress by the new arrivals. In 1719, 44 men were at the factory while in 1737 the complement is 28, but there are an additional 47 at Eskimo Point working on the fort.

The Little Ice Age was not known about until the 1950s, when its existence was so thoroughly documented by Hubert Lamb of East Anglia University, but its chilling impact was very much a part of the lives of the employees of the Company already dealing with the natural harshness of the Bay. Many of them had signed on to escape the terrible conditions of crop failures, famine, and social collapse that drove so many from Scotland to what is now Northern Ireland in the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the Red River Settlement and other parts of Canada. On the Bay they were faced with the problem of an increasing need for wood at the same time that all the wood close to the post and along the river banks was rapidly being exhausted. One of the biggest difficulties was the inability to operate in the bush during the summer months. "Sent 2 more hands

to those at the Nor'wd Point to gett fire-wood . . . it being Difficult to be Gott when the Snow is off the Ground." This is a problem that still faces modern crews working in the northern bush. The insects above ground and the wet conditions underfoot, aggravated by the permafrost of much of the northern region, meant that it was very difficult to walk in the bush and even more difficult to cut wood and haul it on sleds. Rafting did allow them to go further and further up the river, but eventually this became unacceptable, particularly when some rafts were lost in transit. During the early period of adjustment to the increasing distances and the harsh conditions there were reports about the situation that must have influenced the decisions. "... today our People brought a Small raft of firewood. Considering the time they have been gone, they Say it is Easier to draw wood home in the Winter than to raft home in the Summer by reason of the Large Carraige [sic] they have of it now Upon their backs." The need for snow and the problems of hauling in the summer are fairly constant themes in the journals. A quotation that provides a complete summary of this problem and the general pattern of operation in the early years occurs on 15 December, 1724. "Sent

our men to the Woods as Usual — our Carpenter Employ'd Making a Sledge for our Doggs to haul home part of our firewood, hoping to gett part of itt home by the beginning of March. So that I may Send all our hands over the River in order to Cutt a winters firing for ye next Insueing Year & so to haule itt out to high water marks & sett itt up in a Pile it being very bad Carriage in Summer time from the Woods to high water Mark."

The need for frozen ground and snow for the sled is understandable, what is less obvious are the problems that too much snow can create. The problem was encountered early. "The men went one Turn to the Woods, but the Snow being so deep they could not go any more, until the Snow is Settled in their Track." On 21 October 1734 the journal notes, "Rest of our hands is a cleaning ye ways to Each Pile of Wood yt we might halle it home with ye wooding Sled when opportunity Permits". The difficulties were not confined to the Europeans or to a particular mode of transport. "I never see so much Snow on ye Ground at this time of Year Sence I have known ye Country ye Natives all Complain it is ye Cheif reason they are Starved it being Such bad Traveling".

As the wood close to the river and within reasonable distance of the factory was used up it became necessary to move in from the banks, but, as the quote above shows, it was easier to haul the wood all the way to the factory than to carry it on their shoulders and then raft it down in the spring. The major task was with the firewood that was needed in great quantity and also had to be cut well in advance to allow it to season. It was better to cut the wood from reasonably large stands and these tended to be back from the river and away from the exposed coast. These two facts resulted in changes that were to alter the pattern of the life at the factory quite significantly.

The first was that the wood was cut and hauled to the riverbank in the winter so that it could be rafted in the spring when the ice broke. "Sent our People wth ye Great Sled to haul out a Winters fire Wood to High Watter mark yt It might be Rafted home Next Summer, for our use next Insueing Winter". The second was the practice of having the men live out in tents during the winter months when wood could be cut and hauled more easily. It is not clear from the journals exactly when the practice of many men, the "wooders" as they came to be called, spending most of the winter away from the factory began. It does seem to have been one of those things that evolves gradually because they clearly were spending nights and sometimes longer away from the factory. Certainly by 1724 the practice was in full operation from 8 September of that year because the entry for that day reads, "Sent all hands to ye Woods". On 10 April 1725 after a full winter in the bush, except for a brief respite at Christmas, Rich-

ard Norton the Chief Factor notes, "This Morning I went to the Wooders to order them all home, they having half a winters wood ready for Rafting . . ."

Life in the tents was probably quite comfortable in comparison to the confines and discipline of the factory but it must also have been very cold at times and not without other hardships. The tents were either similar in style to the Indian tent made of deer or moose skins draped over a conical framework of poles, or they were log tents as designed by the men. These appear from Isham's sketch, which is without the advantage of perspective, to be two sets of palisades, possibly with lighter material, leaning against each other to form a ridge tent. The entrance appears to be in the centre of one side at which point there is also a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape. The result is two wooden triangular tents with a centre fire 'courtyard', a situation that was deemed to be much warmer and superior to the teepee style. Later tents were made from canvas with a hole cut in the roof for a chimney and others seem to have evolved into the "prospectors" style with wooden walls and a canvas roof.

In the winter of 1723-1724 there is no mention of the men staying out in the tents but there are many comments about the men hauling firewood on the "Great Sled". It is essential to examine this pattern in the longer trend because the study also shows that the intensity of cutting remained high through until 1732 after which it diminished quite dramatically until 1738. After 1738 it shows a steady increase in the number of days spent cutting firewood until a new peak is reached in 1743.

The pattern of activity is easily understood when considered in conjunction with the timetable of construction of Fort Prince of Wales. The foundations of the Fort were begun in 1731, although serious digging did not begin until 1732. It was not possible for the men to be cutting too much firewood while they were digging foundations and cutting the wood necessary for scaffolding and all the other timbers of construction. Wood had to be stockpiled against the future, or at least until more men could be brought out from England. James Isham, who replaced Norton in 1741, reported that there were two piles of wood one hundred and sixty yards around and approximately twenty feet high. The complement of the factory was increased after the foundations were complete, as mentioned earlier, and the major phase of stonework began thus releasing men back to woodcutting. Unfortunately, this increase in manpower also meant an increased need for wood as construction was accelerated and the new men had to be kept warm.

It is interesting to note that the increased manpower also meant the need for increased food supply or country provisions as they were known. On 9 April 1733 the following entry occurs; "Employ'd our Carp'trs In

making a Roler to Levell Some Land when Weather offers yt we Dugg Last fall on wch I purpose to Experience if Barley or Oats will Grow." With enormous optimism the seeds were sown in a half acre of prepared soil that had been kept clear of snow to allow it to thaw on 23 April of that year.

After 1740 the pattern of cutting, sledding, and rafting firewood was to continue unchanged for many decades. There were some different techniques developed to help increase the supply of wood required by the growing fort. For example, driftwood along the riverbanks and shores of the Bay accumulated as a result of erosion undercutting the forests along the edge of the rivers. Ice action along the river with the spring break-up meant that huge slabs of ice tore and gouged the banks uprooting trees that were washed downstream.

Driftwood was readily available and would have been picked up from the start, however, it also tends to be soaked and in the cool temperatures would take a long time to dry. It is a further indication of the growing need for wood in preparation for the construction of the fort that initially it was the practice to go along the shoreline with the pinnace as on 16 June 1725, "Sent our pinnace Down the River for Driftwood — She Return'd Loaded." Later that summer they were collecting the driftwood, forming it into rafts and bringing it to the woodpiles that were growing outside the gate to the factory.

A familiar part of the boreal forest to tundra transition zone is the willow or brushwood. It provides a fairly dense cover for wildlife but can make movement difficult in the winter as it traps the drifting snow. Before any building could be constructed this brushwood had to be cleared, which created a problem because it exposed the permafrost to melting and thus the soil to erosion. Bundles of the brushwood were a valuable fuel source and used in a similar manner to the traditional bundle of faggots which were also assembled. Faggots are bundles of sticks and other loose material gathered and bound, usually with bark strips or some other flammable material, to form an excellent high heat source of fuel. The brushwood was used in the same way but it was also used for fascines, an engineering technique of filling large spaces in stone constructions to save on mortar and other materials. The bastions of the fort were packed in many places with these brushwood fascines.

The more important use of the faggots and brushwood bundles was for generating the high and continuous heat necessary in the lime kilns. It was impossible to import from England the large quantities of mortar necessary to construct the fort, therefore it had to be produced in situ. The local limestone was more than adequate in quantity and quality but in order to produce the volumes of mortar required large

amounts were needed. The crushed limestone has to be fired for at least seventy two hours at consistently high temperatures before the chemical transformation occurs. The faggots and brushwood bundles were an important part of this process, although not the only part. October 6th 1738 saw the men engaged in these activities; "... two men wth our teams a bringing home faggots and brushwood to burn Lime withall — all ye rest of our men yts at home is a cutting brushwood."

Another reason for clearing the brushwood was to prevent any enemy from creeping through the cover to attack the factory and later the fort. The Company specifically ordered that the isthmus of land running out to Eskimo Point be cleared and this appears to have been done with considerable efficiency as depicted by Samuel Hearne's delightful drawing of the factory. It is difficult today to determine exactly how much of the forest and brushwood was cleared but judging by the extent of treeless area today it stretched from Sloop's Cove to the fort. This would be logical because it would be essential to be able to go between the two locations in the open and also to be able to see the cove and the vital boats from the fort and vice versa. Today this area is devoid of most vegetation and soil only remains in very small hollows because once the original vegetation had been removed and the permafrost exposed, soil erosion occurred quite rapidly.

As time passed the distances they had to travel to get firewood increased even though they were cutting stands back from the riverbanks. There was a constant search for fresh stands of useable wood. The factor was always attuned to any reports of potential firewood or construction timber. "This Evening tide I and Mr. Davis Went up the River with the Pinnace to some Woody Islands which are about 20 Miles Up. With a Designe to look for Some Timber of fire-wood." The trip was reasonably successful as a later entry reports that good stands of firewood were found but very little timber. The search continued and the distances lengthened.

Firewood was by far the greatest demand that was placed on the forest resources of the Churchill region but once the wood immediately around the factory had been cut down the distances increased and they became more selective, cutting only larger stands that warranted them setting up the tents. The shape and size of these trees was not very critical although the frequent references to sprigging, the term used to describe the removal of the very small branches that festoon the trunk of many coniferous trees between the main branches, indicate that they were transporting material of a reasonable dimension. Timber for construction purposes was much more critical in the size of material that was required and therefore any tree that was large enough to be cut into dimension sizes was suitable. The search for these trees was a constant problem and

often did not meet with much success, particularly with regard to construction timber.

The trees cut down for the construction of the factory immediately upon arrival and those cut for expansion in the subsequent year or two had to be of minimal dimensions but local adaptations could be made. For example, occasionally they cut planks for facing from smaller trees and set them alternating the taper to form a finished rectangle; similarly, the plans could be altered to accommodate the size of material that was available. Once the fort construction was underway the material that was required had to be cut to the specifications set down on the plans sent out from London. "Sent Mr. Napper & 4 men in ye Shallop up this River to look for Timber to Cutt down According to your Hon^rs Instructions." This entry



was made on 17 September 1730 and it is a measure of their industry and effectiveness of the axes to note that 200 trees had been cut down by Mr. Napper and his men just 12 days later on 29 September.

Once the trees that were to be used for construction material had been cut down they were squared, a term that is self-explanatory. Initially the wood was hauled back to the factory and cut to dimension in the sawpits. The name sawpits is used throughout the journals but quite clearly there was no pit as the rock or the permafrost made it impossible. There is no description but apparently the sawpit was a platform as was the case at other fur trade settlements and has been reconstructed at Old Fort William.

The amount of material cut was prodigious and indicates that many hundreds of hours of painstaking work

was carried out either on top or, possibly worse, under the platform. An entry for 26 March 1739 itemizes 660 boards varying in thickness from 1 and ½ to 3 inches and in length from 11 to 18 feet for a grand total of 7,664 board feet of timber. In addition a list of squared timbers including 700 joists each 6 inches by 4 inches and 10 feet long makes the arms ache at the thought. A very common word throughout the journals is "deal", a word still in use in England and defined as a slice sawn from a log 9 inches wide, not more than 3 inches thick and at least 6 feet long.

It is not our purpose here to look at the details of how the wood was used and the amount of carpentry work necessary for doors, windows, furniture and all the other accoutrements of a large eighteenth century fort. Suffice to say that all these things required wood, as did the masts for ships; the timbers for repair of damaged boats; a flagstaff in July of 1732; pens for livestock and countless other wooden implements. The one thing that becomes apparent as the journals are studied for references to wood, timber and their uses is the absolute importance of this resource to the functioning of an eighteenth century community. This was particularly true in the harsh environment that confronted the employees of the Company as they clung to the outer edges of a continent that has one of the largest forest areas in the world.

Perhaps the ultimate irony of this segment of the history of Churchill is the fact that the stone fort was probably the most uncomfortable and cold residence that could have been constructed. Samuel Hearne surrendered the fort in 1782 after many freezing years within its cold walls but refused to live there when he returned in 1783, choosing instead to bring a prefabricated house from England that was kept warm by the accumulated ice on the inside walls. This he considered preferable to the fort with its large fireplaces which consumed the precious fuel at a great rate so that fires were only allowed twice a day. Heat was conserved by placing an iron plate over the top of the chimney when the fire had been reduced to embers but this kept the smoke in the room. Another practice was to heat 24 pound cannon shot in the fire and then to hang them in the windows in a valiant effort to intervene between the outside chill and the sufferers inside.

The efforts to keep warm had a much greater impact outside on the meager forests that exist at the northern limits of the boreal forest. Cold, dessicating wind, and the inability to trap snow results in a very slow rate of replacement and re-growth of trees so that the effects of that impact are still visible today. ♦

Tim Ball teaches geography at the University of Winnipeg and devotes a measure of his time to the work of the Rupert's Land Research Centre.

Playing "Robbers & P'lice"

By Trevor Lautens

MAYOR GERRY
The Remarkable Gerald
Grattan McGeer

By David Ricardo Williams. Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver and Toronto, 1986. 319 pp., illus. \$24.95.

In the mayors' offices of this continent, once there were giants — with here and there a giantess. They flavoured their cities, and the flavour spread far beyond municipal boundaries. Among them were New York's Jimmy Walker and Fiorello LaGuardia, Montreal's Camilien Houde, Winnipeg's Stephen Juba, Ottawa's Charlotte Whitton, Toronto's Nathan Phillips, Chicago's Richard Daley. Ed Koch of New York somewhat continues the tradition; Jean Drapeau's retirement in Montreal ended a spectacular one. And then there was Gerry McGeer of Vancouver.

Picture this. Home after a regatta weekend, the mayor of a substantial city dons a Glengarry, dances a jig around the room, visits his daughter in her bedroom, precipitately and apparently without precedent seizes a bottle of her eau de cologne, drinks it in a swig, and next morning is found dead in his study.

The prime minister of the country sends condolences to the widow, then months later writes apologetically that he had been distracted: "... In the afternoon of the day he passed away, I was preparing to take my little dog, Pat, to be operated on at night, knowing only too well that the dear little fellow would not be able to survive. ... After the operation he passed away almost immediately. I mention this, as you may have been surprised at not hav-



Mayor Gerry McGeer.

ing received some fuller immediate expression of my feelings for you. ... I just had to avoid any emotional strain which any attempt to write at the time would most certainly have occasioned."

The players in the above fiction-defying scenario were Vancouver Mayor Gerald Grattan McGeer and of course William Lyon MacKenzie King. We are moved to imagining that even the experienced aplomb of a St. Peter must have been ruffled at the appearance at the pearly gates on the same day of Gerry McGeer and Mackenzie King's dog. And this in a nation widely regarded — and, rather proudly, self-regarded — as dull. (From another nation, one that for years has been defying sincerely mediocre and truly uninteresting leadership, comes *The New Republic's* nomination for the most boring

headline ever, in the *New York Times*: "Worthwhile Canadian Initiative.")

It is good to report that David Ricardo Williams relates this episode, and indeed the entire McGeer life, with commendable understatement. Faced with the task of limning a career that lit the political skies like a spark-showing skyrocket (and, in the end, with scarcely more permanence), the award-winning Mr. Williams has written a conscientious, scholarly work. No euphemisms for dull. This is a good book. Gerry McGeer's life was deliciously hyped. There is no need to hype it further.

But it would be a mistake — many of his enemies made it, and went away wiser — to think of McGeer as a lightweight who was merely a "character", terrific copy for the papers, an inexhaustible 96-point Boxcar headline. He had amazing mental and physical capacities, was a shrewd and meticulously briefed lawyer, and soaked up facts and sprayed speeches and articles about his pet subjects like a machine gun. He also inspired public affection. He was an unshakeable burr under countless saddles in high places, including the ambiguous King's, but he was adored by a lot of little folks, sometimes for unpleasant reasons. There was a touch of the demagogue and of the racist, though perhaps no more than the times demanded, about him.

He was born in Winnipeg in 1888, his grandfather an Irish cattle-drover, his father variously a reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, dairy farmer, and land developer. The McGeers moved to British Columbia when Gerry was

two. Young McGeer left school at 14 and became an iron moulder and union activist, experiences that he was later to exploit on the hustings (not without some backfiring). He returned to school, matriculated with all but perfect marks — the lowest was 98 in French — and studied law at Dalhousie.

His political career, equally Liberal by party and Irish in tone, was to be astonishingly varied — member of the B.C. Legislature, of Parliament, and a senator as well as mayor of Vancouver — but his early efforts were generally failed or frustrated. He first won wider attention as B.C.'s counsel at the Board of Railway Commissioners, where he threw himself against the province's natal and eternal problem of freight rates. (He rightly claimed some success — and some staggering fees, a theme of his career as a government lawyer, which were hotly contested and reluctantly reduced.) Mr. Williams patiently leads his readers through the Byzantine maze of the mountain differential, the Crow's Nest rates, and so forth, and it is good reading.

Along the way McGeer also chose a wife, Charlotte, daughter of a legendary B.C. merchant, David Spencer. Another theme: McGeer was out of town almost as much as Ulysses, wrote countless passionate letters lamenting his absence and vowing to return (usually from Ottawa) never more to roam, and never ceased to roam. Charl seems to have played a gracious Penelope, spent a long widowhood, and died at 95. There was a considerable practical advantage to the marriage: the couple were allowed to shop free at the Spencer stores (later sold to Eaton's) and ran up a tab of \$37,000 by McGeer's death.

The high point of public life was as mayor of Vancouver in the turbulent Depression years 1935-36. His energy and pugnaciousness were astounding. He landed in the mayor's chair fighting on every front: against crime, police corruption, his own council, Victoria, Ottawa, the bankers for their cruel interest rates on civic debt (he "thought nothing of writing seventy-page articles with gaudy titles referring to the evil

banks such as 'The Temple of Baal' or 'The High Cathedral of Usury'"). In the devastating 1930s McGeer had embraced monetary theories paralleling those of the new Social Credit movement, though he denounced the party that adopted that name in Alberta, and his "national credit" arguments were a staple of his public utterances for years.

Inevitably, too, the militant unionists and the radical-led mobs from federal works camps suffered McGeer's wrath, culminating in his famous reading of the Riot Act on 23 April 1935 — preceded by a belated: "Well, boys, you've asked for it!" His left-wing enemies never ceased taunting the one-time union militant for his action that day.

Not that McGeer was much easier on his friends. He was never deterred by anyone or anything, including his loyalty to the Liberal party, and perhaps only a Mackenzie King could have endured McGeer's flaming public rebukes without either disciplining his maverick member or abandoning their curious friendship. (When King named McGeer a senator in 1945 he soothed furious Liberals, including some cabinet members, by confiding that McGeer was a politically useful radical in a West that was moving toward the CCF.)

McGeer rode out all storms as mayor, wrangled acceptance of a new city hall, and in the economically improved year of 1936 triumphantly presided over the city's 50th anniversary celebrations. Mr. Williams reveals the secret of his success, then and ever: "... the incredible energy of the man. Nobody could keep up with him." There were some glory days in Ottawa ahead, a reprise as mayor ("Get going, you thugs, because I'm coming again, and there's no room in town for you!") after a campaign fought from a hospital bed in 1946, but that energy was running down, ravaged by bouts of drinking, and he died in office on 11 August 1947, aged 59. A picture of the throngs along the funeral cortege route testifies to Gerry McGeer's immense popularity with Vancouver's ordinary people.

Mr. Williams has judiciously assembled some epitaphs. His own, not meant unkindly, is "the most successful failed politician of his time". McGeer's monetary views affronted the intellects of many, and perhaps are his enduring negative legacy; John W. Daffoe of the *Winnipeg Free Press* called him "much the ablest and the most dangerous of these credit cranks". The best living witness is Bruce Hutchison, still going strong in his mid-eighties. As a reporter Hutchison knew McGeer well, and he has contributed a terse, perceptive introduction to the book. In sum: a man who didn't realize his monetary view implied "a system of far-reaching, iron-clad state authority", and elsewhere: "a demagogue... a kind of Huey Long of British Columbia."

McGeer's nephew, Patrick L. McGeer, noted brain researcher and former B.C. minister of science and universities — whose father was generously helped by Gerry McGeer in the hard '30s — believes that in the federal cabinet, with his capability and drive, his uncle could have done more than any politician in this century except C.D. Howe. And for those ascribing to the school of

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thought that no one knows better than the great man's secretary, this splendid insight from a stenographer, Beth McBride: "Somehow Gerry McGeer always made me think of a small, tough, earnest boy, playing 'robbers & p'lice', and I should not be a bit surprised if he retained this impish quality to the end of his days."

The dead stand mute and naked in the dock of history, unable to explain or defend themselves, while the living turn them over with fas-

tidious toes like dead frogs. So in fairness the last insight on McGeer should go to McGeer himself.

During a speech at the University of B.C. a woman shouted at him: "I wouldn't vote for you if you were the Angel Gabriel." McGeer replied: "Madam, if I were the Angel Gabriel, you would not be in my constituency."

Trevor Lautens is a Vancouver writer and editor.

Scientist and Showman

By Philip Goldring

STEF

A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson
Canadian Arctic Explorer

By William R. Hunt. University of
British Columbia Press, Vancouver,
1986. 317 pp., illus. \$29.95.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson, it should be said at the outset, led the kind of life that defies biographical treatment. He was an international figure, a fascinating combination of explorer, scientist, adventurer and popularizer of provocative theories about the Arctic.

His Canadian career was short — two years in infancy and about a decade in his thirties and forties — but Hunt's biography sketches a career that offers much to interest Canadians. "Stef" did, after all, in the space of six months induce the Hudson's Bay Company to invest \$200,000 for absolutely no return, and he manoeuvred Mackenzie King's government into an international tangle, offending Britain, Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union by one rash pronouncement. Any man who could nudge King into political indiscretion, and prod the HBC into squandering money, clearly had unusual qualities. Hunt does justice to Stef's attractive qualities, and reveals why tycoons and prime ministers thought Stefansson was a man worth listening to.

Stefansson was born in 1879 in Manitoba's Icelandic settlement, and became a British subject again in Ottawa in 1913. He did this in order to work on Canada's behalf in discovering several islands in the Arctic Archipelago. These islands proved to be the last major pieces of unknown land discovered on the globe. He spent most of the intervening years, and the rest of his adult life in the United States. His parents moved there when he was two, and a chequered academic career brought him to Harvard in 1903, ostensibly as a divinity student. He studied anthropology, and in 1906 went north on the first of three separate expeditions that would cover a dozen years. His physical courage and iconoclastic attitudes fueled an admiration for the Alaskan natives and an enthusiasm for their way of life, two feelings which conflicted with prevailing white attitudes in the western Arctic. Stefansson's interest in the North was not sated by a second, four-year expedition, so he returned south in 1912 with an ambition and a problem. His ambition was to do original field work among little-known Inuit of the Central Arctic, the "Copper Eskimo" of Coronation Gulf. Stefansson's problem was to assemble the funding that such expeditions required. Despite his modest standing as a graduate student, he applied

himself to the technique of seeking funds from foundations, societies, newspapers and museums.

The pursuit of funds led Stefansson into the swampy frontiers between science and adventure, an unpleasant aspect of the explorer's life that Hunt sympathetically describes in the words of many famous adventurers. Science has goals and methods which co-exist uneasily with the hyperbolic predictions, spectacular achievements and grandiose claims required to raise funds for exploration. Hunt, whose previous book on Frederick Cook prepared him for this study, stakes out his ground early in the biography: "explorers are a bizarre group marked by strong personal characteristics" some attractive, some unpleasant. Winning and keeping the attention of moneyed men and agencies could be as costly in its own way as the physical privation of travel in unknown regions. The subtle techniques of modern academic grantsmanship had a brutal ancestor in the buccaneering pursuit of money for turn-of-the-century exploration.

Although Stefansson's scientific goal in 1913 was to complete research among the "Copper Eskimos", the eye-catching part of his program was to seek new land north of the Parry Channel. This worried Sir Robert Borden's Conservative government, which had discontinued the Arctic's sovereignty patrols in the Eastern Arctic but did not want land north of Canada to be discovered by foreigners. Since Stefansson's funding was incomplete, Borden simply bought out the expedition. The erstwhile American backers were cut adrift, Stefansson was sworn in as a British subject, and the initial modest plan was recast as the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913. Reinforced by scientists from the Geological Survey of Canada and others specially recruited, the expedition was reshaped into a northern party and a southern one under Stefansson's general command. The parties remained in the field longer than intended, consumed far more than the original allocation of funds, and lost both ships and lives.

Many small debacles and the ultimate, qualified success of the CAE are well-described elsewhere, and need not be rehearsed here. Stefansson never submitted a general report on the northern party (which he commanded personally) but issued instead, through his New York publisher, a high-coloured account in *The Friendly Arctic* (1921). His erstwhile friend and bitter enemy, Rudolph Anderson, withheld the report of the southern party to prevent Stefansson from having the last word. Some of the acrimony between the two men stemmed from Stefansson's use of Anderson's diaries in writing up their previous expedition's report: this was exacerbated by a clash of views about Stefansson's authority after the loss of the northern party's vessel, a disaster which left Stefansson without a party to command. Good published accounts of the CAE include William McKinlay's haunting memoir of this shipwreck, *Karluk* (1976), and Richard Diubaldo's definitive *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic* (1978), an admirable exposition of personalities and issues.

When Stefansson came south in 1918 he was 39; his career in the field was over. For the rest of his life — he died in 1962 — he remained in the public eye, lecturing, writing books and newspaper articles, building up his library and, more prosaically, working on contract for the United States government. This complex man approached his mission from a simple point of view: southerners had much to learn from the Inuit. A well-equipped man in the proper frame of mind would find the Arctic a friendly place, teeming with animal food and no colder than many places in "temperate" zones. Unhappily for Stef, two early ventures were disasters. The Hudson's Bay Company was one agency in the 1920s that looked favourably on ambitious development schemes in the Arctic, but a costly importation of reindeer to Baffin Island proved a dead loss. Stefansson also set up a company to develop Wrangel Island, north of Siberia. Impatient at politicians' footdragging, he sent a small party

to colonize the island for Canada. Mackenzie King's government unwisely backed Stef's claim that Wrangel Island was Canadian; the young colonists lacked Stefansson's skill, his prudence and his luck. Rival empires growled, and the young adventurers starved to death. Since Canadians in the 1920s were only gradually developing their near North, they turned their backs hastily on the arctic dreamer. He left plenty of enemies in Ottawa to ensure that the sound part of his arctic science would be discounted with the rest.

Stefansson foresaw the development of Great Circle air routes across the Pole and, in *The Northward Course of Empire* (1922) compared the Arctic Ocean of the future with the Mediterranean Sea in classical times. Although a good deal of the underlying scientific knowledge was accurate, or at any rate was based on his own unique experiences, his role as a publicist caused problems. Overstatement provoked controversy, controversy sold books and tickets to his lectures, and sales provided the wherewithal for Stefansson to go on reading, travelling, and writing. Although his doctoral studies at Harvard were swept aside by the grander scheme of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, and his skills as a publicist undermined his reputation as a scholar, his basic instincts remained those of a scientist. By 1946 he was renting two New York apartments to house his arctic library. A few years later the collection was sold to Dartmouth College, and Stefansson moved with it to Hanover, New Hampshire. There he continued his research and conducted a regular arctic seminar.

Ironically, this move brought him into range of a McCarthyite attack in 1955. Stef had written extensively on the Soviet Arctic and this, with the many diverse people he had befriended, exposed him to the prevailing anti-Communist hysteria. He was far too seasoned a debater to be much ruffled by interrogation — Hunt claims he enjoyed it. He died in August, 1962.

There is no mechanical rule or standard formula for writing a biog-

raphy, whether scholarly or popular. This book perches uneasily on the scholarly end of the scale, but scholarly biography at its best borrows some of the techniques of popular history. In particular, biographers should be allowed to share with the reader an imaginative re-creation of the emotional climate of the past, as well as a factual recitation of events.

William Hunt has not seen the biographer's role in this way, or perhaps he was bowled over by the larger-than-life qualities of his subject. Hunt set out (xii) "not to be for, against, or charitable, but just to tell everything that he has space for, if it is pertinent and interesting" — a prescription he took from Stefansson's own late writings. Hunt has not followed even this cautious course rigidly — fortunately, because such a bread-and-water recipe could never employ the highly-flavoured ingredients of Stef's career. The explorer was simply too self-assured, too partisan, to be dealt with dispassionately.

In fact the challenge Hunt faced is brought into sharp relief by comparison with Richard Diubaldo's analysis of the years in Stefansson's career that most interest Canadians, from 1908 to 1923. Diubaldo was no uncritical admirer of Stefansson, and regarded him, in fact, as a man whose managerial shortcomings caused endless difficulties and cost lives. On the other hand, Diubaldo did not disguise his admiration for Stefansson's courage, ingenuity, perseverance and luck. (He also fitted 15 years into 250 pages, while Hunt covered an entire life in about the same space.)

Stefansson never seemed to grasp the magnitude of his failures; nor would he understate the importance of his achievements. Hunt struggles to be both scholar and partisan, coping with the contradiction in Stef between the scientist and the showman. Along the way Hunt tangles with Diubaldo on a few points. He sometimes gets the better of him, but many Canadians will prefer Diubaldo's more detailed and specialized book to explain the effects of Stefansson's work in Canada. A single example may not be unfair.

Hunt (169) says that Stefansson "served as an unpaid adviser to the Hudson's Bay Company" on the Baffin Island reindeer scheme; Diubaldo (149-50) described the details of Stefansson's deal with the HBC, which included \$10,000 worth of fully paid up shares in the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company; the Reindeer Company also agreed to pay him a small salary. Whatever became of the salary, it was mainly Stefansson's errors that made shares in the Reindeer Company worthless.

While many readers will find Hunt's approach uncritical, he has assembled a readable narrative which catches the flavour of the American exploring fraternity in the early twentieth century. An exhaustive bibliography of Stef's books and articles is a monument of sorts to the man himself, and a permanent aid to future research. A man of Stefansson's calibre probably deserves a fresh biography every dozen years or so. In this one William Hunt has served his subject, and his readers, tolerably well.

Philip Goldring, a historian with Parks Canada in Ottawa, is a frequent contributor to The Beaver.

First Impressions

By J.M. Bumsted

NATIVES AND NEWCOMERS
Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered

By Bruce G. Trigger. McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston and Montreal, 1985. 430 pp., illus. \$35.00.

Ethnohistory has been one of the major growth areas in Canadian social science scholarship in recent years, and one of the few fields in

which Canadians have taken the lead and pushed the frontiers of knowledge outward to any significant degree. Anthropologist Bruce G. Trigger has been one of the principal contributors to the Canadian thrust, and in this long and complex work he distills the fruits of a lifetime's research and thought on the problems of studying native people in the prehistoric and early contact periods. It is difficult to know how to label this book, since it is a combination of methodological considerations with revisionist substantive information. The book is difficult to get involved with, since the opening chapters are abstract and highly technical, and nowhere is Trigger content with a simple account of events, constantly interweaving narrative and methodological considerations.

For those readers who prefer social science methodology kept well in the background, Trigger's book will not be a popular one. On the other hand, for readers interested in keeping abreast of the latest developments in an exciting field of scholarship, but not willing to plough through dozens of specialist journals, the book is a godsend.

The main outlines of the new interpretations of native history and of early contact between natives and Europeans have now been relatively commonly diffused. The principal points have been to eliminate a concept of native culture indeterminately frozen in time and unchanging until well after the arrival of the European intruders; to sophisticate the account of native-white cultural relationships beyond the previous "fatal impact" view of such contact; and in general, to insist that native history is part of the record that needs to be included in any attempt at recounting Canada's past.

Although anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century, many influenced by Franz Boas, made considerable advances in their studies of native peoples, they contributed one extremely misleading convention in their notion of the "ethnographic present," in which traditional cultures could be described in the present tense

regardless of the nature of the evidence. Lying behind this convention, of course, was the idea that the elimination of European influences from modern scholarly observations would return our understanding of native culture to that stable state it had experienced before European intrusion. Native cultures were stable, almost frozen, because they represented natural human responses to environments which changed only glacially. As Trigger points out in considerable detail, such views cannot be maintained any longer, particularly given the evidence coming from the archaeologists. One often gets the feeling that Trigger's colleagues in anthropology are the people against whom much of this book is directed, and that too many anthropologists have still not adjusted to the evidence coming from other disciplines.

Inherent in the new evidence is the fact that native cultures were highly adaptive and constantly changing before European intrusion. Such a realization does not make these cultures automatically less subject to European influence. In some cases, the fundamental European influence may have occurred before recorded contact, particularly in terms of encouragement to trade and in terms of exposure to European disease, which may well have decimated native populations in the sixteenth century. However, native cultures did have some resistance to Europe, and some ability to incorporate European influence without disintegrating. Christianity was far more destructive than Capitalism, at least in the early period.

Many of Trigger's interpretations have been and are controversial, and the substantive portions of the book are pretty well limited to the native peoples of central Canada, particularly Huron and Iroquois. *Natives and Newcomers* is not an easy read, and it is not a book with which one necessarily agrees in all particulars. But it does repay the effort.

J.M. Bumsted teaches history at the University of Manitoba.

THE PACKET

Letters to and from The Editor

The Triple Crown of Canadian Cuisine

Beaver tail, moose nose and buffalo hump! — legendary delicacies of Canada, unavailable in even the best restaurants, that I have always intended to try.

What a stroke of luck to find preparation instructions for two-out-of-three within one story (Stuffed Beaver With All The Trimmings) in your fascinating December 1986/January 1987 issue of *The Beaver*.

In your archives do you have a recipe for buffalo hump, suitable for the lay cook?

As a true Canadian I wish to be prepared to partake of each ingredient in our culinary Triple Crown that may someday present itself.

D. Desmond Nolan
Nepean, Ontario

Mr. Nolan's request for a recipe for "buffalo hump" is a difficult one to respond to. A number of pioneer cookery books give recipes for buffalo steak and buffalo roast, but the Editor was only able to find one reference to what might be called "buffalo hump" in a memoir written by Donald Graham who feasted on buffalo south of Fort Edmonton at Christmas, 1872. Mr. Graham



shot the beast himself and gives this account of what followed: "After bleeding him and walking round and round before I could make up my mind to leave him, I hurried to our camp to tell the others. They came

back with me, and after skinning it, we cut off the hind quarter and the tongue. Into the remainder I placed half a bottle of strychnine for the wolves, which always followed a buffalo herd. Next morning I was up bright and early, and visited what was left of the buffalo. There I found two dead wolves which we skinned, and Charlie cut out the back fat, a wide strip of which extended the full length of the back. As the strychnine never leaves the stomach, this fat is considered a great delicacy and was eaten with great relish."

The back fat was, presumably, roasted over the fire before eating. Why it was left overnight is not explained. Readers who know about "back fat" and "buffalo hump" and recall how it was prepared for the table are urged to share their knowledge. A thought intrudes. Did the "back fat" come from the wolf? Oh dear!
—C.D.

Mushing Along The Trail

The derivation of words is but one small topic of interest kindled while reading historical accounts such as those in *The Beaver*. As a current example, the word "marche" (Ghost Story, *The Beaver* December 1986/January 1987) immediately struck a chord.

A Toronto tabloid recently carried an article about dogsled trekking at the eastern end of Algonquin Park, as a recreational experience. The reporter/participant stated that only Hollywood dogs understand the word "mush", and that "pick it up" was used for increased speed, "ahead" to discourage wandering off trail or backing up, and "whoa" for stop. Realizing that dogs would respond to whatever commands they were

trained on, I wondered at the origin of "mush" which has been in our sled dog vocabulary since King of The Royal Mounted.

Subsequently reading "marche" in Ghost Story, the thought occurred to me that mush may well be a derivation of same. It would be interesting to know if such is the case, and also what other words of command were/are in common usage in true sled dog country.

The Beaver continues to broaden the reader's knowledge of and interest in our country's history, and its format is also much appreciated. Excellent reading — a unique publication in every way.

John Moore
Udora, Ontario

A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

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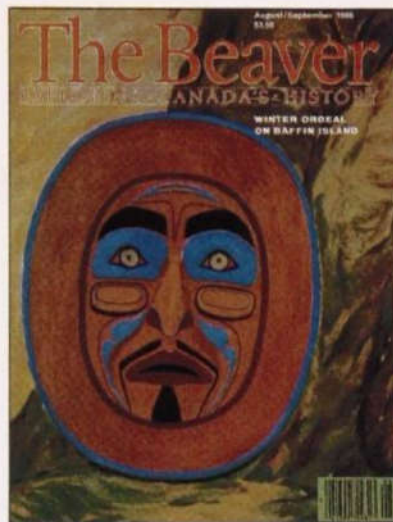
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